

FEAR

☠ HORROR ☠ FANTASY ☠ SCIENCE FICTION ☠

THE UNBORN

Mourning
sickness
gross-out

From a nibble...

GHOST
On
video

...to a bite!

**GRAVEYARD
SHIFT**

THE MOVIE MAKERS

From script to storyboard...

NEIL GAIMAN

Birth of a comic book...



As Beltane marks the beginning of summer, and the smoke from its fires slowly lifts, **FEAR** continues on its exclusives trail. And a laborious task it can be: security surrounding new blockbusting productions in the making can take on paranoid proportions, and one such movie is *Aliens III* — a shape shifter if ever there was one. For the first part of what we promise will be a no holds barred series on the *Movie Makers* we went straight to the man who knows the full SP on *Aliens III*, and probably better than the dozen or so directors who have been on the project. Martin Asbury was a storyboard artist on the film and his interview contains inside info on the production, but the storyboards he kindly provided us with you will not get to see — yet. Fear of early exposure of details of plot and action has stopped their publication until a later date. Disappointing to the readers of **FEAR**, but understandable in the cut-throat world of the movie business: remember how many quick low-budget derivatives of *The Abyss* elbowed their way onto screens large and small to steal the thunder of the real thing.

When millions of pounds are at stake, the diluting effect even inferior — but similar — product can have on the all-important box-office takings is crucial, and while **FEAR** loves exclusives it does not intend to jeopardise the results of the blood, sweat and tears that go into a film project of this size. Stay tuned though, we will be providing exclusive coverage nonetheless...

FEAR

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DESIGNED FOR TROUBLE

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Ordinary babies can be borrisic enough, evacuating gunge at regular intervals through any and all available orifices. It's hardly surprising that they figure so often in

horror films.

In *The Unborn* — which marks the directing debut of Rodman Flender — the horror starts before the babies are even born, thanks to the unhealthy scientific obsessions and interventions of one Dr Meyerling.

'It's a film that addresses the subject of designer babies,' says Flender. I happened to see this Barbara Walters' special called *The Perfect Baby*, that explored gene mapping, eliminating disease and other things that they can alter in the very early stages of the fetus's development. It is happening, it's not something that's pure science fiction. In a horror film you can take that subject into the realm of nightmares.

'The Unborn encompasses a variety

of plot elements,' Flender explains. 'It has horror, science fiction, drama and even a little comedy. What's nice about the horror genre is you can take it to its logical, worst possible extreme. I think it's been done with films like The Terminator, in terms of automation and computers taking over in the future.'

Flender began his career at Concorde in 1986 when Roger Corman hired him as the director of publicity and marketing. In the spring of 1988 he became vice-president of production. 'I've always enjoyed horror films, and I felt very comfortable with the genre. The treatment for this script was actually sent to me a few years ago as head of production. I liked it so much, I didn't want to give it away

and I saved it for myself. The script was well written and I felt very comfortable with it.'

BLOODY SATIRE

Before coming to Concorde, Flender studied as a film maker at Harvard. It was his student film, a social satire, called *The Bloody Mutators* that caught Corman's eye. Flender says that while working for Roger for four years, you learn by osmosis. More than that, you learn by doing. Working at Concorde is not like being a film executive at a major studio. I was required to be down on the set solving problems.

'Also, when you work for Roger, you're given little assignments. There was one film that had some special effects that didn't turn out the way Roger wanted them. So, he told me, 'Go fix them.' At that time I didn't really know about miniatures and special effects. After three intense, grueling weeks I knew a lot.'

In addition to Flender's technical film experience, he has some impressive acting credits on Broadway. He has even appeared in programmes on CBS television. He claims that his experience as an actor helped him as a director. 'I'm really proud of the calibre of the performances in *The Unborn*. I feel my acting background really let me communicate more with the actors and in a way that they could understand.

'I think that's a problem that a lot of the film school graduates have. I'd see that many know cameras and lighting inside out, much more than I know technically, but they just have not had that much experience with

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Doctor Meyerling (James Karen) is up to his eyes in gene-mapped placentas. Meanwhile some poor woman has a designer bun in the oven

years, and I felt that I knew how to produce a good commercial film as well as anyone, and produce it on budget and on time. I also enjoyed producing very much and didn't want to give it up. As head of production I had the chance to work with several directors who I respected.

'With Flenderco, I have a first-deal look with Roger. When I went to direct *The Unborn*, I had to give up my position - leave the nest. I still wanted to work with Roger and he knows that I can produce good films.

'I'm looking for some very good projects right now. I can tell you what I'm not looking for. I'm not looking for westerns, movies with puppets or dolls, singing dinosaurs and movies about talking washing machines.'

Flenderco is developing its first project, *Heat Of Passion*. Flender is writing, directing, and producing it. *Heat Of Passion* is a film noir, erotic thriller. There are no monsters, children or animals in it. I'm really happy to have the opportunity to do an erotic thriller. It's sad, but in this industry if you do a really good horror film you tend to get pigeon-holed as a horror film director. I love the genre and want to make a few more horror films. I want people to know that I can handle other genres just as well. I'd like to do a really funny comedy.'

SINGING DINOSAURS

Flender is not the type of film maker to sit around and wait for Hollywood to come knocking at his door. He has formed his own production company, Flenderco, which will develop and produce three films a year. 'I had been head of production for Roger for two



actors. My acting background is invaluable.

'Good horror can let an actor explore an emotional range that's hard to find in any other genre. It's sad that when people generally think of horror films, they see formulated teenage slasher kind of films. How many people do they think they kill in five minutes? When I think of something that's a 'real' horror story, like *Rosemary's Baby*. Where real people are placed in extraordinary situations. That true

horror is an opportunity to take on a challenge for good actors, and something they wouldn't want to pass up.'

NEWS FLASH!

- This year's British Fantasy Society convention, Fantascon XVI, will be held at the Ramada Inn in South London. Guests of honour include: Dan Simmons, Jonathan Carroll and Brian Lumley. For registration and accommodation details etc. send SAE to Fantascon, 15 Stanley Road, Morden, Surrey SM4 5DE.
- Guy N Smith's infamous crabs are getting the chance to crack their claws on celluloid. The cranky crustaceans are reported to be costing in the region of £80,000 - and you thought that dressed crab in the fishmongers was expensive.
- Brian Clemens, of *The Avengers* scriptwriting fame, has confirmed that he will be at The Festival of Fantastic Films 1991. Also confirmed are Tigon film's Tony Tenser, Ingrid Pitt and Screaming Lord Sutch. Venue: Trusthouse Forte Excelsior Hotel, Manchester Airport from October 4 to 6. Details: Society of Fantastic Films, 95 Meadowgate Road, Salford M6 8EN.
- James Herbert's *Fluke* is being serialized on Radio 4's *A Book At Bedtime*, apparently the first horror title to win its way into this prestige slot.
- In Graham Masterton's *Scare Care* anthology, there's an American address listed for donations to the charity trust. Now we're pleased to be able to give you the British address for contributions - Scare Care Trust, Account number: 0556965, Lloyd's Bank, High Street, Epsom, Surrey.
- It had to happen. First comics became artistically and literary worthwhile things. Now they're good investments too. *The Official Comic Book Price Guide For Great Britain* should help prospective comics speculators. And the first five FEAR readers to buy copies of it from Stateside Comics, 125 East Barnet Road, Barnet, can get a couple of quick knocked off the usual retail price of £8.95, just mention where you heard about the book.

CELTIC DRAMA



Stephen Lawhead writes that rarest form of fantasy - one actually based on authentic Celtic mythology. John Gilbert dusts off his torcs, slips into a druidical frame of mind and seeks out this enigma.

While many of our British writers swap these shores for sunnier Californian climes, American fantasy author Stephen Lawhead last year moved his family into a large house in Oxford. It is the abode of his publisher, Lion, but also provides the ideal locale from which to research the Celtic facts and myths with which he has basted such series as *The Pendragon Cycle* and the new *Song Of Albion* trilogy. 'Celtic Britain is pretty much lacking in my great plains, prairie state of Nebraska. I started writing *The Paradise War* over there, but it was a real struggle to keep myself immersed in all of that.'

For writers, whether it's Britons going to the US or Americans coming over here, you just have to be some place that pushes you out a little bit from the familiar. If a thing is too familiar it becomes almost invisible. What a writer wants is for everything to have this great significance, and you can do that by moving some place where everything is strange - where

every tree and rock and bush has this immense significance.'

Oxford is, in some respects, a transit junction for Lawhead. He is an itinerant traveller, and Scotland is his favourite haunt, but he also sees the necessity for being a suburbanite. 'You do need a bit of a town: book stores help, libraries help, and all the support systems of modern life, fax machines and that sort of thing.'

Britain is coated in Celtic mythology which is there for all to see, but it is American, rather than British, writers who have taken advantage of its potentials for fiction. According to Lawhead, this pre-occupation with Celtic culture 'works the same way as place works for writers. Unfamiliar subjects can take on an aura that the familiar just doesn't have. Someone might find great fascination writing about plains Indians, but since I grew up on the plains and had seen Indians around now and then, they're no fascination to me.'

'Part of what a writer does is, he works out of a sense of wonder, and it's all about how to stoke that up. The other thing is that most Americans came from some place else and so when an American writes about something British, or Irish or Scottish, a lot of Americans are Scottish and Irish. It's an attempt to re-imagine or at least put themselves back into continuity with the past. Plus, all the Celtic stuff is Western, and it belongs to the Western countries as it doesn't belong to the East.'

SORTING OUT THE FRENCHIES

The first part of Lawhead's new series continues his fascination with the Celts and dives into the myths of the Otherworld rather than the history which was evident in his *Pendragon* cycle. And yet, as with the *Pendragon* cycle, he is keen to eliminate the

Hollywood ethos and the French/medieval corruptions of Celtic folklore that have occurred in the past 100 years. 'It's valid that every age and generation takes up those stories and tells them in their own way. But what I was trying to do was get back to what would have been a more appropriate setting for the stories.'

'I didn't have a sense of trying to do something different just to be different but to be true to what I found was there once all the medieval stuff was set aside. All those things about the lovers' (trials) (the Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot triangle), those are great stories, they just didn't happen to belong to the original core material.'

CELTIC SOAP

His rejection of the Hollywood school of myth-making also raises reservations about how his material could be brought to the big screen. 'What you'd probably get across really well would be the ambience, the emotional charge that the books carry. You could probably get some sort of story loosely based on what's in the books. You'd probably get some good sense of place and of character, but you just couldn't capture the intricacies of the interaction of characters. What Hollywood seems to demand the most is action, obviously the battles would be pushed way up to the top, but that's only part of the books. So, I think that what would be best would be a sort of television mini-series giving it a longer time to develop and be able to get in so much more.'

Although Lawhead is somewhat cagey about Hollywood's ability to adapt a large-landscape fantasy to the screen, he has few qualms about the emphasis of entertainment within the film world. Indeed, he describes himself as an entertainer and has included elements of contemporary detective and thriller genres in his new book. 'I knew it was going to take a while to get over into the Otherworld in terms of story. There was a pretty good set up so that everything was in place, so that once characters moved to the Otherworld, they had some sort of sense what they're moving to and away from. I suppose I could have thrown them into it at the beginning, but then you wouldn't get the great pay-off that you get when they actually cross over.'

'I was going for a particular effect, and I needed a long set up to that. If you do that then you're delaying readers along the way, so I tried to build in some elements that would keep people entertained.'

'I tried different sort of mystery, suspense, thriller elements just to keep the pages turning so that when the proper time came to make the move into the Otherworld, we could do that without having to look back.'

Once the *Song Of Albion* series is complete, sometime within the next three years, Lawhead plans to leave the worlds of Celtic mythology and move into the realms of Eastern mysticism. 'I've just started getting my feet wet in Eastern things, so, yes, I'm jumping in that direction. Unfortunately, you can't travel in most of those countries at the moment so I'd have to do a lot of the research in books.'

'I've been working on this project in

the back of my mind for about two years. It has its own immense past, but it's also positioned out there in the future some place. What comes to me from that is that often in the Eastern stories is this enormous landscape of the past with all this weight of this history, and they're counting at the year 3000 or something. So they're dating much further back than we are, and you think, 'what must it have been like to have that enormous sweep of history to push you ahead.' So, what I'm thinking of for the next one is something that has that much history behind it, but is taking place in a world in what can only be called the future.' It sounds like a mammoth task, but Stephen Lawhead has already begun the huge Eastern ideas bible with which he will write the projected series, and his fans, and perhaps the whole fantasy community, can expect something very different from their favourite author within the next five years. Meanwhile, next year he will publish *Silver Hand* the next book in *The Song Of Albion* trilogy.

WAKING FROM REM SLEEP

Finally awakening from its long slumber, the new quarterly science fiction and fantasy magazine R.E.M. has finally made a welcome appearance. Originally scheduled for last year, it merged briefly with *Psycho Candy*, that partnership fell through, *Psycho Candy* went the way of all flesh and R.E.M. was going to appear as a digest-sized mag. But now it's on sale as a 48 page A4 mag at £1.95 co-published by Arthur Straker (the originator of the R.E.M. concept) and Andrew Coates (the originator of *Psycho Candy*).

Fear's Liz Holliday does the book reviews. The rest of the mag is devoted almost exclusively to fiction of variable standards - too many words by Simon Ings and not enough by Eric Brown in issue 1. When they stop playing with too many fonts and design features on their DTP system, it should be interesting to see if they can capture any of *Interzone's* readership, compete with *BBT* and *The Gate*, or indeed steal the thunder of *Dream Science Fiction* which is scheduled for a revamp.

Subscriptions are £7 for four issues. R.E.M. Publications, 19 Sandringham Road, London NW2 5EP.

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THE INVISIBLE MAN REVEALED



Photo: Per Nilsson

From the splendours of *Dark Star*, through *Halloween* and *The Fog*, the genius of cult hero John Carpenter shines through. Thomas Nilsson met up with him in California for yet another FEAR exclusive.

It's been a while since John Carpenter was last in the lime-light. But, he's now back at work making a new movie for Warner Bros based on the Harry P Saint novel *The Memoirs Of The Invisible Man*, starring Chevy Chase. This is kind of a strange take on of the invisible man; he is a sympathetic character, supposed to be a mad scientist, but now a stupid yuppie who gets turned invisible and who tries to continue his life. It should be fun.

It seems a strange direction to move in, very different from the genre movies of the past. The movies come and find me. When I got into this business all I wanted to make was westerns. And I haven't done one, except

for a television western. Instead I got associated with horror films — which I love dearly — and that's usually what I get offered. But I wanted to make a mainstream film, I have done several that haven't been. That's why I went to Chevy Chase because I like him as an actor. I think he's a really, really talented comedian.

The Invisible Man project already existed and I had read it. And I thought: 'I can make this. Now I'll just have to see if I can. We've been working on the screenplay for some six months and it's all very challenging. One of the biggest problems is that in the story, sometimes it's told as a memoir so the Chevy Chase character is describing how it feels to be invisible. Basically the whole movie is a flashback, so what we're doing is very tricky — the guys forget that he's invisible sometimes and he assumes he's visible so in those sections of the film we do see him, just as normally as I'm sitting here. It's only when he confronts someone else that he realizes that he's not invisible. So the movie has to be shot from two points of view; one is his memoir point of view and the others is the other characters'. You're seeing him and then you're not seeing him, it's a very tricky balance. Very challenging.

It's not the only challenge he's about to face. He's also getting involved in a remake of *Creature From The Black Lagoon*, and that's something I'd really love to do. This will be one of the two films that I'm under contract to make for Universal and it'll be fun. The problem is that the studio want to make the original movie once again, but I'm going to make a different film, the film I want to make, and if they don't like it... they don't have to do it at all!

I've turned down things that have been extremely successful, *Top Gun* and *Fatal Attraction*, for instance. And I'm not sorry I did, I think they're both pieces of shit, both movies that I thought 'why do they want me to do it?' Especially *Fatal Attraction* — that was Clint Eastwood's *Play Misty For Me* all over again. I can't do that as well as Eastwood did it. It's a yuppie horror movie and who wants to see that? And in the original script, the bad girl won, but when it turned out that the test audience hated that, they went back and reshot a more traditional horror ending. This is a big problem here. Most of the movies are driven by the fact that the business has changed so much in the past five years and now you have to play it 'safe': that means happy endings, no bumps in the road, everything has to be smooth and quick. It all has to look like commercials or MTV videos because the audience hates uncertainty. The problem with audience expectation even haunted Carpenter during the test screening of his classic *The Thing*. This particular group consisted of people aged between 14 and 28, and there was this teenage girl who said to me, 'What happened in the end?' and I said, 'Well, that question was what we planned the audience to be asking themselves after leaving the theatre. Just use your imagination'. The girl's reply stunned me: 'Oh, I hate that!' And that's the answer. People hate using their imagination. They want it spelled out. Carpenter also sees this unease with imagination as a typically American response. 'But even back in the 50s or 60s, some of the pictures were certainly not the kind of happy ending bullshit we see nowadays. Really, literally, directors don't want to hold on a shot more than

10 seconds because they think the audience is gonna be bored.' Despite audience apathy and the insensitivities of the American film board, MPAA, Carpenter has occasionally managed to get his own way with the powers that be. 'I first ran into the MPAA when they wanted to rate *Assault on Precinct 13* an X because there's a scene where a little girl gets killed. They told me I had to change that, so I cut out the scene from the one print I sent over to the MPAA who gave the film an R, but I didn't touch the rest of the prints. They all went out uncut.'

ROTTING CORPSE

In Carpenter's LA office, there are plenty of Stephen King novels on his bookshelves. Some of his work I like a lot, some of them I don't care too much for. I'd just love to do *The Tommyknockers* — it's a real creepy story. I've worked with King once, on *Christine* (1983), but the film didn't turn out very good. I was the one who screwed it up, I simply left out stuff from the novel that I should have used in the film, like the rotting corpse that's haunting the teenager who buys the car.

The problem with King's novels are that sometimes they're a bit funky, the plot doesn't translate to the movies that well. *Firestarters* was one project that I was involved with for a while, I thought that one could have been good because there was such a very clear understanding of what's happening. Unfortunately, it didn't work out in the end.

'Carrie' worked out OK probably because it was the first time that psychokinetic had been done pretty well on the screen and that's usually what Stephen King is all about. On the other hand, *The Shining* was a joke, I thought. It was very funny, hysterical funny.

Perhaps it's appropriate then that Carpenter's next movie will be a comedy, but he assures all his dedicated followers that he has no plans of abandoning the horror genre. I love horror films and I'm always keeping an eye out for a good story. It's difficult to make a supernatural movie believable. Love stories are possible in real life, most horror plots are not, so you really have to convince the audience to believe in what they see.

'Scaring people is fun and I enjoy doing that, it's not very hard. In my approach to movies I'm pretty secure in being able to make people scared in a couple of places. Then again, it's all down to the story if it's going to be really good.'

Thanks to the flooding market of home-videos, a whole new generation is currently discovering the magic of his films, and Carpenter himself is pleased to know that there are people out there watching his work. He appreciates his fans. 'Once there was a guy who approached me about doing a book on me. I grew up with your films', this guy told me. 'Jesus, how old am I? That was a little depressive, but also very nice. I was very flattered.'

John Carpenter is of course well aware of the fact that today he is seen as a cult director. Is that a heavy burden? 'Man, I don't know. I just make movies and the rest is all a mystery. I'll just keep working.'

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THE RESURREC

JB Macabre, a man who loves the craft of film making, unleashes news about the filming of The Strange Case Of Charles Dexter Ward.

One of the most sought after authors for movie adaptations is HP Lovecraft. While many of his stories have been adulterated for the screen, such as *The Un-Nameable*, *The Shuttered Room* and *The Dunwich Horror*, there have been others that capture a sense of Lovecraft's genius, add a bit of satire and reflect an off-centre vision, as with *The Re-Animator* and *From Beyond*.

Lovecraft is noted for short stories, but one of his novel length tales is *The Case Of Charles Dexter Ward*. In an

attempt to bring this strange tale to the screen, producers Mark Borde and Kenneth Raich enlisted the talents of Dan O'Bannon, as director, and Brent V Friedman, as screenplay writer, to bring us *The Resurrected*. The film is a combination of classic horror elements and traditional story-telling principles resulting in a frightening tale which examines the age old quest for immortality.

'I think it's been an awfully long time since there's been a horror movie that's a good solid yarn for adults to enjoy,' said O'Bannon.

Charles Dexter Ward, played by Chris Sarandon, is a wealthy New England scientist who becomes caught up in the research of his 18th Century ancestor, alchemist Joseph Curwen. As Ward descends down the dark trail

his ancestor has left for him, he sets up a laboratory in Curwen's old farmhouse, outside of town. Ward's obsessive behaviour becomes more erratic, and his wife hires private investigator John March, played by John Terry, to find out exactly what's wrong with her husband. March learns that Ward is trying to duplicate Curwen's experiments, which have one purpose - to bring the dead back to life. Like all scientists, Ward has his successes and failures, but his failures are very much alive and roam the maze of catacombs found below the farmhouse. It is in those pits of the undead that March will learn Ward's ultimate secret.

As soon as producer Mark Borde read Friedman's script, *Shatterbrain*, he knew that it was unlike any horror film he'd seen in recent years. 'The genre itself tends to have been over-exploited,' Borde said. 'What I liked about *The Resurrected* was that it wasn't just another horror movie. It had elements that were fresh, this combination of the modern everyday world that we can all relate to intertwined with the Gothic horror tale. It had that thing that any producer looks for: do you want to continue turning the page? I read it in one sitting!'

Borde took the script to Scotti Bros Pictures who shared his enthusiasm for the script. Through the aid of a mutual friend, Borde got the script to O'Bannon. Borde wasn't aware at the time that one of O'Bannon's passions was the work of Lovecraft and that he wanted to turn the same story into a film.

'The joining of O'Bannon to that script was a perfect mating,' reflected producer Kenneth Raich. 'I can only say that the man who wrote *Alien* and *Total Recall* does not walk down the street in a normal way. I don't mean that in a bad way. It's his ability to get that kind of feeling. He's got to be kind of out there.'

Borde was quick to add that, 'He has a feeling for the genre, number



TION SHUFFLE

one. He loved the project and there was dedication to the material itself, it wasn't just a job. Number two, he had an expertise. He had done it many, many times. I find that many of the best directors come out of screen writing because they have a passion for what they're doing.'

O'Bannon began his career when he collaborated with his classmate John Carpenter on his film *Dark Star*. He then went on to write *Alien*. He made his feature film directing debut with the 1985 horror cult hit *Return Of The Living Dead*. Dan is a fan of the genre and explains his own personal fondness for the works of Lovecraft: 'I think he's just about the scariest writer who ever wrote.'

RESPECTING THE HUMAN FORM

To bring Ward's mistakes — the things that dwell in the tunnels beneath the farmhouse — to the screen, O'Bannon turned to his favourite artist, Francis Bacon — a weird artist who takes the human form and twists it upside down and inside out.

The job of creating the monstrosities fell to Todd Masters. Masters' work has been seen in such films as *Nightmare On Elm Street V*, *Dead Heat*, *Predator*, *The Howling IV*, *RoboCop II* and *Poltenegeist II*. 'I tried for tone rather than dimension,' said Masters, 'and used every method known — as well as some never tried before — to bring them to life.'

'We wanted to do things that are, of course, different than anybody else has ever done,' added Borde.

A tribute to Master's talent came during production in Vancouver, Canada. One of the scenes for the film required an armada of fake bodies and parts, which accidentally got swept down stream during filming on a rain-swollen river. The authorities came in to help clean things up, however two weeks later three eight-year-old boys hooked a full body while fishing. The police came and took the body to the coroner. For some reason, it took almost an entire day to discover that the body wasn't real!



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CLOSE TO THE MARK

From the heady days of punk, via Elland Road and the Enterprise Allowance scheme to being a full-time horror writer... Pete Crowther charts the rise and rise of Mark Morris.

Headingly is the primary dormitory for Leeds's sprawling conglomeration of academic establishments. A lot of ex-students tend to end up there, particularly those of an artistic bent. It's where Mark Morris — he of *Toady* and the recently released *Stitch* fame — lives with his artist wife, Nel Whatmore.

On normal days, the clatter of WP keys and the creak of Nel's easel are the only sounds to permeate the stillness of their small terraced house, the inside of which is richly and colourfully festooned with Nel's paintings and the cover artwork from many macabre works.

It's not a good day for Morris. Both he and the increasingly worn WP keys are engaged in an extended two-minute silence to mark the recent passing of Leeds United from the FA Cup. 'I've supported them since I was nine-years-old,' he mourns. 'Watched them home and away. It's really just a sort of outlet for my aggression, I suppose.'

Morris's other outlet, of course, is writing. His first book was *The Winter Tree* which, he now recalls, wasn't particularly good. 'I look back on it now and think 'My God, how could people get interested in this! The fact is, they couldn't. The second attempt, *Toady*, was started when Morris was 22 and completed two-and-a-half years later. It was a massive tome, sprawling genres (occasionally uncomfortably) and paying homage to scenes, styles and plot developments from books and writers which have become bywords in the field of horror fiction.

As a debut, it was justly hailed from all corners — and by no less than Morris's honorary mentor, Ramsey Campbell — as an impressive piece of writing. In retrospect though, Morris agrees that it tried to be too much to too many.

The follow-up, *Stitch*, nearly didn't get published at all. Its heavy sexual leanings made it the first book published by Plunkett that has ever been read by the solicitor to ensure that it didn't contravene the Obscene Publications Act.

SIN AND SEXUALITY

'When I was writing the book, I knew it was very strong. It's very explicit in its exploration of sin and sexuality and it does go into some very grim areas. But I knew that I couldn't namby-pamby around. Even when I was writing it I thought, 'Shit, I can't possibly submit this! And Nel was reading it and it was upsetting her, and then the publisher — who was very good about it all — asked me if I didn't think it was a little bit obscene. So they called in the solicitor. I waited in trepidation for the response.'

Fortunately, when the solicitor responded, the verdict was a thumbs-up with the observation that, while some areas were 'pretty strong', the content was all relevant to the story.

'One of the aims of horror fiction is to explore taboos,' he points out when I ask if the *Stitch* furor had made him feel guilty or proud. 'So, in that sense, I suppose I did feel proud. The point is, though, that I don't set out to disgust the reader. There is an inherent humanity in horror fiction and my real aim is to create a sense of wonder and a sense of awe in the reader. But, equally, pushing away things that are unpleasant and pretending that they don't exist can be a very dangerous thing to do.'

Morris was born in Bolsover, a small mining village near Chesterfield, 28 years ago. Shortly afterwards the clan moved to Tewkesbury, then to Hong Kong, back to Newark and, finally, to Huddersfield.

By the time he was 12, Morris had written several Doctor Who stories. 'Despite that, it never really occurred to me to do it for a living,' he says 'even when I was a college. I went to Trinity and All Saints in Horsfield (about five miles north-west of Huddersfield) to study History and Public Media, and I just became enmeshed in the full social thing.'

After graduating, Morris started sending his scribbles for professional consideration. 'I sent them all over, even to producers at the BBC. Then I wrote some short stories and just sent them off to publishers, not knowing anything about the market. I even sent a few things off to some American magazines and they wrote back mentioning other writers, one of whom was Ramsey Campbell.'

DANSE MACABRE

Mention of Campbell sends Morris into paroxysms of admiration. At the time, he had only recently finished and inwardly digested Stephen King's *Danse Macabre* in which the section on Campbell had had a profound effect. 'I wrote to him and asked if I could send him some of my stories and he was just so incredibly helpful and enthusiastic, suggesting that I attend this horror fiction writing course he was running over a particular week-



Mark Morris recovers from his *Stitch* in time to pose for this piccy and answer some searching questions.

end.

'Unfortunately, the course was cancelled but Ramsey said that he would read the stories of everybody who had booked to attend. So, I sent him some things and he wrote back saying they were, you know, strikingly written, but pointing out ways they could be improved. And he also suggested that I attend the Fantasycon in September. So I went down and took a load of stories with me, handing them out to editors.'

One of those editors was Charles Grant, then editing the *Shadows* series. 'I never heard anything, but I left it for a couple of months and then wrote to him. Didn't hear anything again so I wrote to him again after a another couple of months. Again, nothing. So I finally wrote this really crappy letter saying how frustrating it was, you know, going on about the fact that I was trying to do something and he wasn't getting back to me.'

'And within a couple of weeks of that letter going out, I got a phone call says, 'Hi, this is Charles Grant'. Immediately I thought, 'Oh shit, he's going to rip into me for this nasty letter'. But he was great, incredibly apologetic for not getting back to me sooner, and he finished off by saying he wanted to buy one of my stories. I felt that I'd finally made it.'

So, writing full-time extended its lure, and, primarily to placate the DHSS, he opted to join the Enterprise Allowance scheme. The result was *Toady*. As we talked, *Stitch* was just about to hit the bookshops but its successor, *The Immaculate*, is already half-way complete. 'I see the three — *Toady*, *Stitch* and *The Immaculate* — as being a kind of trilogy showcasing the different themes and ideas, and moods and styles that I will probably adopt in future work.'

Aside from writing and football, Morris's other great love is music. 'I was very much a product of the punk generation, I suppose. I was around 14

when The Pistols and The Stranglers came along and I think all that stuff influenced me to do exactly what I wanted to do and not care about what other people thought.'

Taking a leaf out of many of King's books, Morris even kicked off two of the three component sections of *Toady* with music lyrics, one from Siouxsie And The Banshees' 'Hybrid' and the other from The Stranglers' 'Death And Night And Blood'. There was going to be another one — from the Jam — but they wanted to charge me too much money to use it so it got dropped.

Mostly it's heavy metal bands that get associated with the horror genre, I suppose because of the old Black Sabbath Gothic-black-magic-and-noise-syndrome. But for me it's the punk bands which have the best link into horror. Look at The Banshees' song 'Carcass', for instance, or the Black side of The Stranglers' 'Black And White' album. I still regard myself as a punk, although I'm into all sort of music now.'

Maybe he's mellowing in his old age.

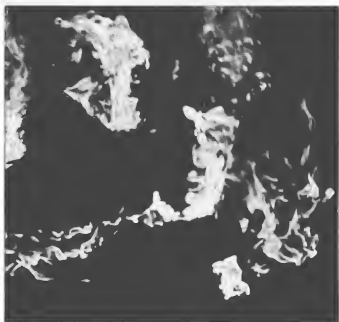
WATCH OUT FOR THE FEAR FICTION AWARDS

It's almost that time of the year again! The fabbo, fantastic, FEAR fiction awards are looming into view. From all the fiction we've published over the past 12 months, you'll have a chance to cast a vote for your favourite. Look out for the nomination form and further information in next month's issue.

THE WORLD OF FEAR

MANIACAL REALISM

Police brutality's bad enough when it's only mortal cops who are duffing you up in the comfort of your own home. An undead psychopathic copper is worse news - he doesn't even have the prospect of losing his pension to moderate his behaviour. John Gilbert dons body armour and tackles the director of *Maniac Cop 2*



Director William Lustig has an eye for tragedy. His films, such as the recently released *Maniac Cop 2*, all have a social angle which veers most definitely away from the imaginary strains of Gothic. 'I like social satire. I grew up in New York, and here the tabloids take the biggest tragedies and put them under head-

lines such as *Headless Dancer In Topless Bar*. It's how they make their money.'

The *Maniac Cop* series is like one of those screaming headlines, but handled with a discretion that makes viewers think, at least in the first movie that maybe a cop who is set up by his superiors, went to Sing Sing prison, and apparently dies at the hands of the inmates could return for revenge.'

Police corruption certainly proved a popular concept with cinema audiences who were ready to be taken past the likes of Al Pacino's *Serpico*, and now the sequel is set to wipe up on video. But, the creation of the series came about through a much older, and even more controversial, Lustig movie called *Maniac* - which we went so far as to describe as 'sickening' in issue 2 of FEAR.

I had lunch with [scriptwriter] Larry Cohen four years ago and he said, 'why haven't you done a sequel to *Maniac*?' I said, 'Well, I never really knew where to go with it', and we came up with an idea. The one thing I didn't want in the sequel was the police. They're the boring part of movies because you know that once they arrive you're safe. But, I thought, why not make it so that when the police arrive you know that something's going to happen.'

Looking at the story from the outside, the police can't have been enamoured with the corruption and violence ascribed to the blue knights in *Maniac Cop*. Not so: 'I know of some locker rooms where they have the original poster hanging, and I think that the police look at this film with a sense of humour - with Cordell as a sort of Jason in police uniform.'

Whereas the first film only hinted at supernatural influences but largely remained on rock solid ground, the sequel steps firmly into the realms of

the undead, after Cordell takes a dip in a river and is pummeled with bullets. 'In the first film, we rode the fence and didn't give it an answer. We wanted to send a message saying that we were taking everyday life and playing games with it. But in the second film the audience would have been pissed off if we'd have given them more of the same. So, we said: 'fuck it. Let's make him supernatural.'

DEADLY UNBALANCING ACT

The director also said, 'fuck it, let's kill the stars of the first movie in the second', but for very good, dramatic, reasons. We decided that those characters (played by Bruce Campbell and Laurence Landon) had been explored to the limit in the first film. Having decided that that was the case, we used their demise to throw the audience off balance.'

Their deaths left Robert Davi as the unusual hero of the piece. Known mainly for his villainy, particularly in *Licence To Kill*, Davi played his cop character as a solid officer but one who could be just as corrupt as his masters. 'One of the concepts I wanted in *Maniac Cop 2* was that, in a former existence, Cordell could have been the mirror image of Davi today. Davi could be chasing his own ghost. Cordell then forces him to explore his own self. I don't know whether that came across but I also intended *Maniac Cop 2* to be a slam bang movie. If I'd really driven that point home it would have just stopped the movie.'

Maniac Cop 2 was not a huge box office success and one of the reasons given by Lustig for that failure is the clichéd ending. Although, as director, he is at ease with the show 'em everything scene of Cordell smashing his way out of the coffin, Lustig, like Clive Barker in *Nightbreed*, would have preferred something a little subtler. 'I shot that three months after we finished. In the original you just see Robert Davi looking around the cemetery, and he thinks he hears something.'

Was a fight [with the production company]. They wanted me to either take out the whole cemetery scene or they wanted him [Cordell] to make an appearance. I didn't care as long as it opened the door for *Maniac Cop 3*.'

Although he is privately unhappy with the ending of this sequel, Lustig is generally pleased with the movie and wants to make a third - even if that ambition is still little more than 'a dream'. But first he has two very different films in pre-production. The first is called *'True Romance*. It's a cross between *Bonnie And Clyde* and *Something Wild*. It's in the process of casting and we'll shoot in the summer.

The other film is *Brute Force* and that's from a Larry Cohen script. It's a kind of social satire and action film. 'They certainly sound very different from the mayhem that Lustig and Cohen are used to splashing on the screen.'

HORROR CONVENTION WAY DOWN SOUTH

Southern hospitality is justifiably famous, and co-chairs Beth Gwinn and Maurine Dorris did their best to ensure that everyone who attended the first World Horror Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, had a good time. However, with only 300 attendees, this alternative gathering for lovers of dark fantasy barely managed to cover its costs, and it has a long way to go before it begins to rival the prestige and sophistication of the already well-established World Fantasy Conventions.

Held amid the glass elevators and renovation work of Nashville's Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza over the weekend of February 28th to March 3rd, the convention was marked more by the horror writers who were not there rather than those who made the effort to show up.

Writer Guest of Honour Chelsea Quinn Yarbro (who replaced Clive Barker when he cancelled due to work commitments) maintained a low

profile, appearing rarely, except for scheduled events. However, this was due to a series of death threats she received before the convention, which necessitated a 24-hour bodyguard.

The saving grace of the con was veteran writer Robert Bloch, who was honoured as Grand Master. With inevitable ease he instilled style, wit and charm to an otherwise lacklustre gathering.

The committee decided not to inflict a hotel banquet on attendees. Instead there was a brief ceremony, during which the Guests of Honour were presented with engraved mirrors. Robert Bloch was presented with the first World Horror Award - a blue hand holding a translucent globe, with the position of Nashville marked by a jewel.

Next year the World Horror Convention returns to Nashville with Richard Matheson Senior and Junior as joint Guests of Honour.

Stephen Jones & Jo Fletcher



WAKING UP THE TWILIGHT MAN

Emerging from the depths of the cosmetic counter, JB Macabre brandishes his blusher and tries to find out how John Buechler made it so big

Freddy. Since then, he has gone on to work on mainstream films such as *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* and the new *Phantom Of The Opera*.

His attraction to films and special effects goes way back. 'I always fancied myself as a film maker. From the time that I knew what it was, I knew that is what I wanted to do. As a child, I don't think you can really discern what one person does from another on a movie. I remember seeing films, like *King Kong* and *Frankenstein*, and saying I want to do that. That to me meant the whole thing; from making people do things, making creatures, making it look like night, whatever it took to make it work. It's been something that's been with me since I was young. I pursued it, to the degree that I studied film making in college.

Prior to that, I actually made my own little 8mm epics. Even before that I made little photograph books, like little comic books, where I would act out certain ideas with creatures and it would tell a story. In effect, I taught myself how to make movies before I took my first class in college.

'In college I majored in three areas; fine arts, cinema and theatre. A lot of people think that's a pretty wide range, however, I feel it's very related. After college, I pursued my craft in which ever way I could.

'I began to work professionally in the St Louis area. I worked as everything; from a grip, to make-up man, to actor and director. Every place that I worked, I was able to get my foot in the door. I would bring along a book of pictures, open it up and show them my

work. They would be pictures of people in monster make-up, looking very surrealistic and odd. Then they'd ask, 'Why are you here? You should go to LA'.

WEIRD STUFF

'About twelve years ago I did. I had a portfolio filled with a lot of weird stuff and at that time it was just coming into vogue, due to films like *Star Wars*. The special effects explosion occurred. I was on the ground floor that seemed to be going up. So, I got on; formed a couple of companies, made a lot of special effects and special creatures for a lot of movies, directed a few and acted in a few.

Now, I'm ready to start producing and directing on my own.'

'I think there is still opportunity for the low budget film, if it is extraordinary and tries to break out of moulds that are imposed on it by what people think is commercial and allowed to stand by itself, to still get released theatrically. There are bold and gutsy distributors who are willing to take risks like that. It's a huge risk to spend eighteen million dollars on a film that cost only five hundred-thousand.

'At the same time, you've got to believe in your product. I don't want to get in trouble here, however I think there are a lot of studio executives who are scared to death and don't want to have an opinion. They really don't. They want to see what other people are going to like. If there is going to be any breakthrough film making, it's going to be from people who have approached the equation from a very personal stand point and have been allowed to do things in his or her own way. You see sparkles of that with Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* films and Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator*, where people are basically left alone to do their vision. It was so extraordinary that it had to be seen by people.'

MIGHTILY EXOTIC

Buechler is currently working on *Nightmare On Elm Street VI, To Die For II, Gamera* and *Shapeshifter*. And he's developing his own project, *Twilight Man*. 'A new hero for the 90s - more exotic than James Bond, mightier than Conan. A different kind of horror film, created in the tradition of *Nightmare On Elm Street* and *Friday The 13th*.

'What he is, is James Bond meets Conan and he fights the creatures of darkness. He is a superhero that gets the bad guys. It's *Ghostbusters*, but dark and serious! However, he is not an antagonist, he is a protagonist. He is a good guy, but you still have the same formula of tense-excite-pay-off. It's very much structured like *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, in that you have the exotic weirdness. The punchline is still a monster coming at you, but married to that is this slick hero coping in to save the day. It's very pulp, very Doc Savage, larger than life. I think it has the potential to be very exciting.'

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John Carl Buechler headed the special effects make-up division at New World Pictures. He designed and supervised numerous effects for such critically acclaimed box-office hits as *Ghoulies*, *Re-Animator*, *From Beyond* and *The Dolls*.

During the 80s he became the first make-up effects artist in history to become a director. He made such films as *Dungeonmaster*, *Troll*, and *Cellar Dueller*. In 1988 he directed and created the special effects make-up for Jason in *Friday The 13th Part VII*. He became the only make-up artist to have worked on all three horror guests: Jason, Michael Myers and

THE WORLD OF FEAR

Humming the chorus to 'Voodoo Chile', FEAR's very own Mr Mojo — JB Macabre — raised a few questions for John Russo.

John Russo is the legendary talent who helped to shock the world with the original *Night Of The Living Dead*. Since then he's made other films and published several horror books. The latest film based on a Russo script *Voodoo Dawn* is ready to hit the cinema. I wondered where the idea came from.

John Russo: It came about sometime in 1985 when Bill Links, who produced *Deadtime Stories* and was instrumental in selling *Return Of The Living Dead*, gave me a ring and said that he saw this show, either '20/20' or '60 Minutes', about a Haitian, having been released from a mental institution, who killed these people in a metal room. I remembered seeing the same programme. Links thought that something along those lines, with a voodoo element, would make a good story. I agreed with him and I already had a similar idea on file. I then wrote the *Voodoo Dawn* screenplay. Links read it and felt that he could get the project financed. Later, I developed it into a novel.

JB Macabre: Why did it take so long to get the project going and was there ever a chance of a theatrical release?

It didn't take me long to do the script. Bedford Entertainment acquired the project right away, however, the company went through some changes. We went through a period when we thought the horror genre was dead. Steve got some people to revise the script and developed it into an action/adventure, which I disagreed with. Nevertheless, that was his prerogative. Time began to lapse with several revisions. Steve began negotiations with financing people and the changes kept delaying the project.

The film is being handled by ADM Associates, a large British theatrical distributors overseas, so there may be a limited theatrical release over there.

Do the majority of your ideas start as cinematic ideas, or does that depend on the concept?

It happens both ways, but it often depends on the project. Some of my novels should stay as novels, they would not make very good films. If a lot of the story's development happens in the character's mind it will not convey well cinematically. So, those stories should remain as novels.

STRANGE FASCINATION

Why are you so fascinated with the horror genre?

It started years ago when I used to go and see every movie that came into town, and a lot of them were horror films. Most were pretty bad. There were a couple of films that caused me



VOODOO DAWN

to sit up and take notice. Two that made an impression on me *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers* and *Mysterious Planet*. Those films showed me that good genre films could be made. I also read all the *Tales From The Crypt* and the other EC comic stuff. I still enjoy it.

A lot of accountants and executives are getting involved in the film process. Do they make it harder or easier to get a project rolling?

It has always been hard to get any project going. If you watch any of the award ceremonies you hear them talk about how a project was passed up by this or that studio, and took them however many years to make. That seems to be the pattern, even with *The Night Of The Living Dead* remake, which we thought would be a sure thing. It took us three years to begin filming.

One thing that seems to be true, and both Tobe Hooper and Oliver Stone remarked on this in my book *Making Movies*, there was very little climate in the industry, during the 70s, for accepting new blood or young blood. If you did a film like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or *Night Of The Living Dead* the industry said that it was a fluke and you didn't have any easier time getting your next project going. Today there are many young film makers, like Spike Lee, who can do a few for a few thousand dollars and the next thing you know, somebody is giving them six million to make their next film. It seems that if you can do something that will make money, or gets good reviews, at least there is room for acceptance.

SLASHINGLY ORIGINAL

As a writer, do you feel that it is still possible to make a good, original, horror film?

Oh yes. I think it's even possible to make a good slasher film. Much as people say that it is dead. When someone comes up with a brilliant new twist, it works, people will take notice. I haven't seen *Henry: Portrait Of A Serial Killer*, but from what I've read I think they've come up with a new twist that seems to work. I've read the book *The Silence Of The Lambs* and thought that worked.

Voodoo Dawn, in its original form, was more of a slasher film, but it had a unique character, a new twist and a lot of plot. The characters were well written, they weren't the usual gang of kids just out to have fun. There was a little more going on.

What about upcoming projects?

I have a book that I'm under contract to deliver, it's not quite finished, that's a follow up to *Making Movies*. This book is called *Secret Tactics: The Art, Craft And Trade Secrets Of Writing, Producing And Directing Chillers And Thrillers*. While the first book looked at the business side from the ground up, this book deals with the creative side more. In the meantime, I've just finished two screenplays, *Movie Rites* about a special effects artist whose creations turn on him, and *The Horror Channel*, about a spirit channeler and an evil spirit that finds its way into the body of a person on life-support systems. Those are the things I've just sent to my agent.

GREENLAND TAKES BACK PLENTY OF AWARDS

From the cheers and applause on both occasions, Colin Greenland's space opera *Take Back Plenty* was a very popular, as well as a deserved winner of both of Britain's science fiction awards, less than two weeks apart, writes David V Barrett. For the first time, the same book has won the Arthur C Clarke Award and the BSFA Award. It is also the first time that a British writer has won the Clarke award — the only SF award in the world to come with money attached: a cheque for £1,000.

These awards confirm Greenland's standing as one of Britain's finest young writers in the genre. On each occasion he faced stiff competition. The Clarke Award was presented in London's the Graucha Club, by Clarke's brother Fred on March 20. *Take Back Plenty* was chased by two powerful and magical books, Mary Gentle's baroque extravaganza *Rats And Gargoyles* and Pat Murphy's beautiful post-holocaust *The City, Not Long After*. The shortlist also included Iain M Banks's *Use Of Weapons*, Misha's *Red Spider*, White Web, and KW Jeter's *Farewell Horizontal*.

The Clarke award judges this year were: Neil Gaiman and Roz Kaveney for the Science Fiction Foundation, Cecil Nurse and myself for the BSFA, and Professor George Teeling-Smith OBE and Dr Maurice Goldsmith for the International Science Policy Foundation, under the chairmanship of Maxim Jakubowski, owner of the new *Murder One*, *New Worlds* and *Heart Lines* triple-genre bookshop.

The BSFA Award is voted on by members of the BSFA and attendees at the annual Easter SF convention (held in Glasgow this year). *Rats And Gargoyles* and *Use Of Weapons* were again on the shortlist, along with *The Difference Engine* by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, and *Hyperion* by Dan Simmons. The BSFA Award for short fiction went to Kim Newman for his 'The Original Dr Shade' which appeared in *Interzone* 36.

TIME WARPS AND LOATHING

The present may be bad enough, and the prospects for the future might stop your heart, but according to KW Jeter, they're as nothing compared to the nightmares locked up in the past. Les Escott takes a history lesson in the psychology of horror.

The horror novels of KW Jeter attract much praise from the likes of Ramsey Campbell and Charles de Lint, so why is he known in Britain primarily for his science fiction and fantasy novels?

A large part of it can be explained by Jeter's stubborn refusal to let himself be easily pigeonholed. 'I've made a real effort to make my stuff hard to categorize,' he says. 'A lot of writers are rushing to label themselves with whatever the label-of-the-month is, and I just see that as a sort of death for a writer, a living petrification. Labels hobble you, so that you can't sneak up on the reader and hit him with something unexpected.'

Born in Los Angeles in 1950, Jeter started writing after a heavy involvement in the radical university politics of the Vietnam War era. His first novel, *Dr Adder*, was written in 1972, but despite enthusiastic recommendations by Philip K Dick to his publishers, it didn't see print until 1984, when the American SF house, Bluejay Books, brought it out.

In the meantime, Jeter published a few minor novels, including a pastiche sequel to HG Wells' *The Time Machine*, titled *Morlock Night*, and ultimately his horror novel *Soul Eater* in 1983. This was followed by the pub-



Photo: Vikki Blaylock

lication of *Dr Adder* and a string of other acclaimed books: *The Glass Hammer*, *Dark Seeker*, *Death Arms Mantis* and *Farwell Horizontal*. *Farwell Horizontal* has been described as 'a mad concept that astonishes and intrigues,' but it is also Jeter's last SF book.

'Science fiction always tends to be concerned with unimportant matters like the fate of the universe, or the future; stuff like that. I could fake an interest in the future, as some people do, but like everybody else, I really don't give a damn about the future. The future doesn't exist, it's a mythical country. For most people, the present doesn't even exist. The past is the only real world there is.'

HAUNTED BY HISTORY

Those eternal moments when you're lying in your bed and you're staring at the ceiling in the dark — you're not lying there thinking 'Gosh, I wonder what the ozone layer is going to be like in the year 2000, or whether the universe is going to collapse back in on itself a couple of billion years from

now. More likely you're brooding about something that happened when you were a kid. And to me that sort of thing is the most important material of so-called horror fiction, and why I prefer writing it.'

Jeter's horror novels — *Soul Eater*, *Dark Seeker*, *Mantis* and *In The Land Of The Dead* — are written in a stark, clipped prose that owes a good deal to the writing of James M Cain. It is partly this style, and Jeter's other literary influences — the early Joyce, Dick, and the suspense novels of Geoffrey Household, especially *Rogue Male* — that have helped make him difficult to categorize. With Jeter's novels there is none of the family cohesiveness that marks the usual American rural/suburban horror novel, nor is there the welter of corpses seen in many recent books. Instead, Jeter's books are psychological horror novels that are grim and oppressively intense.

The first three of Jeter's novels — *Soul Eater*, *Dark Seeker*, and *Mantis* — were conceived at about the same time and form a loose thematic trilogy. They explore the damage that parents inflict on themselves and their chil-

dren — what Jeter believes to be the hidden agenda of horror fiction. In part this may be due to his experiences working at a juvenile hall in Southern California. 'It gave me a privileged viewpoint into American family life under pressure. Sometimes I'd fill in during the day shifts, especially on visiting days, when the parents would come in to visit their little juvenile delinquent kids. That was an education in itself. I eventually came to see no difference between the way those parents and kids acted toward each other, and the supposedly more normal version of family life outside the juvenile hall. In the juvenile hall, you just saw it with less a mask of gentility.'

ANGEL DUST EPIDEMIC

Jeter was also at the juvenile hall during what he calls the first big PCP epidemic. Only nobody knew then what was going on — three in the morning and the rest of the world's in bed, and I'd be putting the choke hold on some 17-year-old PCP case, with about six of us skinny white liberal arts graduates being taken for a rodeo ride up and down the walls of the intake unit. We'd always go out for a drink after a wild shift like that. Looking back on it, it was kind of a fun thing — really got the old adrenalin pumping.

'For me, family life is like some bad acid version of the jungle ride at Disneyland, where steel-jawed plastic alligators come lurking at you and robot monkeys dance around giving you the finger. That makes it sound a lot less dismal than it really is. The bad acid part of it is that it goes on for ever, in some loop outside of real time — you're 40-years-old and you're still staring up at the bedroom ceiling at three in the morning, your guts in a knot over something that happened to you when you were ten-years-old.'

LOCKED IN THE PAST

This obsession with the psychological past forms the core of Jeter's horror fiction. The past is much darker and scarier than all the disemboweling and brain splattering and all that gross-out anatomical detail. What's the scariest part in *Psycho*? It's when Janet Leigh's sister comes across Norman Bates's bedroom; and it's the bedroom of a child that never grew up. He'd been in that room all his life, with his shabby stuffed animals and his broken toys. Years and years going by and never going out of that room — that room is the inside of his head.

'And the scary part of that scene, what makes it effective is the knowledge that we all have those rooms inside our heads. If we were really afraid, afraid in our guts, of violent death, we'd never go out of the house, out into that world where there are people and cars and all those sort of things that might hurt us. But a greater fear, the fear of our personal Norman Bates's bedroom pushes us out there — we're more afraid of winding up staying in that little room inside our heads for the rest of our lives, than we could ever be afraid of any violence in the outside world.'

Jeter's horror books are currently being issued in paperback by Pan in the UK.

REPTILE

Liz Holliday fires up her dragon and takes a ride into the mind of Anne McCaffrey.

Mention Anne McCaffrey, and most SF fans will think of dragons. Yet, as it turns out, opera's loss has been SF's gain. Those familiar with Anne McCaffrey's work will remember her heroine Killishandra, of the *Crystal Singer* books, who only takes up singing because a flaw renders her otherwise perfect voice unsuitable for operatic leads. This, as I found out when I spoke to Anne McCaffrey on the phone, is roughly autobiographical: 'I'm a failed singer, like Killishandra. I did sing. I had a good character voice, but I fancied myself as the lead of course, and I just didn't have the voice for it.'

'I picked up a story by Edward Hamilton called 'The Star Kings' and it was absolutely marvellous'

During all this time, McCaffrey had been writing. My mother introduced me to Kipling and A Merritt, and I found Austin Tappen Wright's *Islandia* myself. Then in 1950 I had a terrible case of bronchitis, and in the apartment we rented in New York the only thing to read were *Astounding* and *Amazing* magazines. I picked up a story by Edward Hamilton called 'The Star Kings' and it was absolutely marvellous. Took my breath away. I stopped coughing! After that I was hooked on SF. In those days you were lucky if you got an Ace Double every month. I started reading the sort of stuff I wanted to read. I didn't publish a novel until 1965, but I did have about ten or twelve short stories in magazines. If they were going to publish my stories. I was going to write them.'

The pattern McCaffrey has established of turning the protagonists of her earlier, short-



Anne McCaffrey swaps her trusty dragons for a unicorn

er works into the romantic heroines of later novels and series is nowhere more clear than in the case of *The Crystal Singer*. These stories, which would appear to have at least a partly autobiographical source, feature Killishandra, a failed opera singer who takes to crystal singing. This is an occupation offering great rewards in return for great risks, including madness and memory loss. McCaffrey has written two novels about this

heroine, but originally she started out in *Continuum*, a curious hybrid magazine-cum-anthology. Those were four stories I was asked to do in the 70s by Roger Elwood. I'd always wanted to do a central story about her love affair with Lars Dahl. When I started to expand the stories into novel form and bring them up to date I realized, well I couldn't put it all in one novel. Actually, *The Crystal Singer* comprises an expansion of and a diversion from the first two stories from *Continuum*.



ROMANCE

Those original stories always seemed anomalous, taken in the context of the rest of McCaffrey's work. Here, Killishandra is shown as a true tragic heroine from the early flaw — her inability to accept that her voice is not quite good enough — to her final breakdown, which is shown in unsparing detail. Unlike McCaffrey's other work, they had a bitter edge to them, especially welcome as a balance to the sweetness of much of her other story telling. 'She's that sort of person. I just haven't killed her off [in the novels] yet. They don't have happy endings. *Crystal Singer* ends where probably she's going to lose Lansecki, or lose her control over Lansecki. I'm just an optimist, that's all!'

In a similar way *The Rowan* and *Pegasus In Flight* pick up the story she began years ago in *To Ride Pegasus*.

'I wrote *The Lady In The Tower*, which is the basis for *The Rowan* back in 1958. It goes back a long way! Berkley asked me to do something in a romantic vein, because they felt that everything had got far too spaceship and blood and thunder; and they asked would I do a pure romance based on *The Rowan*. When I wrote *To Ride Pegasus* I was actually trying to write towards *The Lady In The Tower* future, but I got sidetracked by my main character in *To Ride Pegasus*, Daffyd ap Owen. Then *Pegasus In Flight* takes up more of the paranormal talents, and how they develop into a structured group that can do more than just locate bodies and predict mass destructive areas. So, the first story was *The Lady In The Tower*, which was expanded into *The Rowan*, which is a far future story. *To Ride Pegasus* is the first of

the parapsychics stories, *Pegasus In Flight* is the next generation. We're nowhere near *The Rowan* yet.'

Though McCaffrey has used the idea of paranormal talents in many of her novels — even the dragons have them — she does not feel that her work has any underlying theme: 'Heavens no! I don't plan that far ahead. I don't even plan a novel that far ahead.'

The two main characters in *Pegasus In Flight* are rather interesting. I started writing about Tirla at the time of those sex abuse cases — the Cleveland cases, and I thought oh, how awful!

TRANSLATING CULTURES

'At the same time Gorbachev and Reagan were having their first conferences, and I was fascinated by the simultaneous interpreters hanging on each one's elbow. It was wonderful. You know, they have to think very quickly on their feet and they really don't have time to lie or to think up wrong words — you're doing it like that, snap snap snap. But sometimes, things are lost in the translation — that has to happen unless you have someone like Todd Reeves in *Decision At Doona* who can understand at a basic level because they have been brought up in the culture. So, if you have someone who could simultaneously translate from any language — like Tirla — what a boon it would be to the disparate cultures we have around.

That was one of the things. What else did I have in mind then? Immobility. How athletes manage to attain top performances because they get their limbic systems work-

ing properly and optimistically, and because they have run through the test they are going to attempt in their head — the skier about to do the downhill slalom has gone through that run so often that he or she knows exactly what to anticipate. So, they go through that performance. It's a mind-set, which is what they were trying to do with Peter. Of course, they were short-circuiting his own latent ability, as I prove.

'And I had a lot of fun with my friend Ludmilla. Then, of course, we started being friendly with the Russians, and I thought ooh Geez!

'So, when I started out I had exterior considerations I put into the book as I was writing it. In fact, I wrote it in two parts. I wrote all of the Tirla part at one point, and then I wrote all of the Rhysa and Peter Reidinger at another. Then I put them together.'

For me, Tirla was by far the most interesting character in the book, so I was a bit disappointed to find that, though McCaffrey starts with her, she almost immediately cuts away to Peter and Rhysa: 'Well, it was a little hard to put it together. A large part of Peter's story comes before Tirla's does. I had to sort of put her in first, and then come back. But she was a fascinating character: a high survivalist type, living on her wits in a very restrictive society that should have been able to catch her.'

McCaffrey fans have several treats in

'I wrote *The Lady In The Tower*, which is the basis for *The Rowan* back in 1958. It goes back a long way!'

store: 'I'm going to be doing more on brain and brawn ships [from the universe of *The Ship Who Sang*], but not on Helva, in a collaboration. The first one will be with Margaret Ball, then there will be two others. These are all people I haven't met. It's interesting, you do these collaborations across the seas — like the *Sassinak* and *Generation Warriors* with Elizabeth Moon.'

Yet she has not forgotten the universe of the paranormal talents, though she will not be writing any more about Tirla. 'I'm going on. The next story — in fact, I'm writing it now — is *Damian*. It's about *The Rowan's* daughter, which was another story in *Get Off The Unicorn*, called 'Meeting Of Minds'. It's going to be very romantic!'

Sassinak is available as an Orbit hardback, £12.95.



MOVIE MAKERS

THE STORYBOARD



Stan Nicholls starts off a new series about the men who make movies by talking to the world renowned storyboard artist, Martin Asbury.



Storyboarders are the pictures that make the moving pictures move. Yet the storyboard artist's contribution is largely underrated, although their work performs several vital functions. Backers see it as a visual handle on the proposed project; it guides the disparate talents comprising the crew; distribution and foreign deals are made on the strength of it before shooting starts.

Martin Asbury has storyboarded a number of films, including *Greystoke*, *Legend*, *Labyrinth*, *Superman IV*, *Lion Heart*, *Air America*, *Alien III* and Richard Attenborough's currently uncompleted *Charlie Chaplin*.

He drew sequences for *Willow*, *Half Moon Street* and *Mountains Of The Moon*. The exhibition of Stephen Ward's pictures in *Scandal* was actually by Asbury, who has a parallel and more visible career as artist on the *Daily Mirror's* *Garth*.

'I also worked on *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*,' he says. 'I did the chase on the train at the beginning, and the final

Superman IV: The Storyboards. Superman takes Louis Lane above the hustle and bustle of Metropolis and out into the idyllic peace of the countryside where they will, no doubt, make hay while the sun shines.

BOARD ARTIST

**NEW
SERIES**



"Flying up high
R to L.



Tighter - as they share
the thrill of flight.



"over coast line



POV - of
fishing village



Martin Asbury overlooks the famous Superman IV flight sequence as the man of steel and his paramour Lois Lane come in for a landing

sequence, when it had to be re-shot. But usually Spielberg has his own bullpen of artists in Los Angeles and they do everything long before he shoots. He's very keen on storyboards and tends to have them before anything else.

Asbury got into this area by pure luck, back in the early 80s, when he was a strip artist. 'A friend of mine had a design agency, and a guy walked in off the street, literally, looking for a storyboard artist. I did TV commercial storyboards occasionally, and as I was the only person my friend knew who did that kind of thing he suggested me. I met this man, who happened to be a production designer, Stewart Craig, and he was about to embark on *Greystoke*. I went to see Hugh Hudson, and it started from there.

BLADE RUNNER

'At about the same time Ridley Scott was looking for storyboard artists because he was going to do *Dune* at that point. I got on with Ridley very well. He asked me to do a trial sequence for *Dune*, which I did, and that impressed him. So he was sort of waiting in the wings, and rang to ask me to go to Los Angeles to work on *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?*, which turned out to be *Blade Runner*. But I declined, because by then I was doing Garth, and couldn't see how to do the two together. But Ridley bore me in mind and asked me to do *Legend*.'

How long did it take to get the hang of this rather specialized work? 'I picked it up fairly quickly. On about my third film I was starting to think like a camera. But I know other cartoonists who have done it and weren't enamoured of the process. You have to bring a certain frame of mind to it; to realize you are part of a team and not the sole creator, as in a strip cartoon, where you are the director.'

Whether the entire script is storyboarded depends on the director. 'Some get quite offended if you start directing the film for them,' Asbury says, 'so they like sequences back for themselves, which they've plotted in their heads and know exactly how to approach.

Then there are films which just have to

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES
MEMORANDUM

TO: HEADS OF DEPARTMENT
FROM: PRODUCTION OFFICE
SUBJECT: STORYBOARDS
14th March, 1983

The following telex was today received from Steven Spielberg in Los Angeles.

TO ALL CONCERNED:

I THINK IT IMPORTANT TO REITERATE MY APPROACH AND PHILOSOPHY TO STORYBOARDS. SINCE THE BEGINNING OF MY MOVIE CAREER, STORYBOARDS HAVE BEEN THE VISUAL LINK BETWEEN DIRECTORS, PRODUCTION DESIGNER, PRODUCER, SPECIAL EFFECTS, STUNTS, COSTUMES, ACTORS, ETC. THEY SIMPLY PRESENT ONE APPROACH TO A SEQUENCE. NOTHING ABOUT THOSE LITTLE INK-LINED DRAWINGS IS EVER LOCKED IN CEMENT. WHEN SOMETHING THAT IS VISUALLY SPECTACULAR COSTS TOO MUCH MONEY, IT'S SO SIMPLE TO REDRAW THE SKETCH. I WILL ALWAYS COMPROMISE WHEN BUDGET OR SAFETY IS A QUESTION MARK. IF I SKETCH A SPECTACULAR STUNT THAT THE EXPERTS LIKE GLEN RANDALL FEEL IS TOO RISKY, WE WILL DO SOMETHING ELSE. IF THERE ARE THREE HUNDRED EXTRAS PENNED IN INK ON A PIECE OF PAPER WHILE OUR BUDGET CALLS FOR ONLY ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY, I WILL DISSOLVE THE INK WHEN YOU SEE SEVERAL HUNDRED SHOTS COMPRISING A FOUR-PAGE ACTION SEQUENCE, IN ALL PROBABILITY I WILL PHOTOGRAPH A THIRD OF WHAT'S THERE. ON "RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK", I ELIMINATED ALMOST FIFTY PERCENT OF MY BOARDING IN ORDER TO MAKE THE SEVENTY-THREE DAY SCHEDULE. MY THINKING HASN'T CHANGED FOR "INDY TWO".

IT IS VERY IMPORTANT IN MY CREATIVE PROCESS TO EXPLORE EVERYTHING IN MY IMAGINATION. PLEASE BE AS FLEXIBLE AS I AM WHEN INTERPRETING AND BUDGETING "INDY TWO" FROM THESE THUMBNAILS. I WILL DIRECT OUR FILM FOR WHATEVER THE AGREE-UPON BUDGET. YOU PROVIDE THE EXACT SHAPE OF THE CONTAINER, AND WITH YOUR HELP, I WILL FILL IT ECONOMICALLY. THE OCEAN AND THE TIME DIFFERENCE OFTEN CREATES A MONUMENTAL COMMUNICATIONS GAP. IF ANYBODY EVER HAS THE SLIGHTEST QUESTION CONCERNING MY STORYBOARDS, PLEASE CALL ME DAY OR NIGHT AT WHATEVER HOUR IS CONVENIENT FOR YOU.

WE WILL MAKE A GREAT PICTURE, BUT WE SHOULD ALL KEEP IN MIND, LIKE "RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK", IT IS ONLY A 'B' PICTURE. MY 'A' MOVIE WAS "1941", AND WE ALL KNOW WHAT HAPPENED THERE.

LOVE AND KISSES
STEVEN

have storyboards because they've got so many special effects. In those cases you have to bring together a lot of elements all at once, and everyone has to know what they are going to be contributing to a sequence, or a shot. If it's an aerial sequence, for example, the pilots need to know where their plane is going to be, and the special effects people have to know where the explosions are going to appear in the sky.'

Storyboards, which can cost between £15,000 and £50,000 to produce, are for the benefit of the whole crew. The director is only the head of a vast team, who all have

around three and a half thousand of those, a lot in full colour; I didn't know they were going to be fed through a copier and come out as gray blodges.'

CREATIVE SMASH AND GRAB

How much room is there for creative interpretation? That's one of the reasons I like it so much - you're allowed quite a bit creative input. It's up for grabs in the pre-production stage, so you can suggest ways of shooting sequences. Working hand in glove with the director you get to know the sort of thing he's

'You have to know what's feasible, and the way to tell a story for a camera rather than the pages of a comic book'

their say. Hardly ever do you do it for the director alone, with the exception possibly of someone like Dickie Attenborough, who tends to want storyboards for his eyes only.

'If a storyboard is agreed, it's printed on a Xerox for distribution. That's one of the drawbacks; you're working for a copying machine and not a printing process, so your work by that definition has to be a bit more simple. Which is possibly another reason some of the strip cartoonists didn't like doing it. They want to take their time and draw nice pictures, and I don't blame them for that. The fact is your work is copied and eventually thrown away.

'For *Greystoke* I did huge drawings, not knowing any better, at least eight or ten inches wide by about four inches deep. I did

looking for; whether he likes a fluid camera or a locked-off camera, whether he likes wide-angle shots or very tight shots. You try to think his way then embroider on it.'

A prime use of storyboards is to test the feasibility of scenes. Working out how to deploy large numbers of extras, for example, as Asbury did on *Charlie Chaplin*. 'We have I think five hundred people, and we're going to make it look something like three thousand. They'll be optically reduced or enlarged and put all over the screen. You have to show how that will be done and what's the best camera angle to use.

There's a scene set at King's Cross Station, and we couldn't afford a locomotive, which cost something like £12,000 for the day. We could only hire three Victorian type

carriages. Then there's the cost of disrupting the station while you film. This underlines another function of the storyboard - it enabled us to plan that scene in advance and work out the cheapest shot. I devised a way of shooting it so you don't see the locomotive at all. You just see steam.'

There is the chance of contributing to characterization too. 'Often you have to, because the costume designer isn't on the film when you're storyboarding, and sometimes the film hasn't been cast anyway. You have to visualize what the characters will look like, and what they would wear, roughly. Obviously you can't do too much, because if you do you'll be spending your time drawing the costumes and not the action.

'You don't put dialogue on a storyboard of course but there can be technical notes. There are camera directions, and possibly you should know what lens is being used. You have to know, if the camera is going to be in a certain position, how much it will see, and whether it will be tracking or panning. It's very different from strip cartooning in that respect. You have to know what's feasible, and the way to tell a story for a camera rather than the pages of a comic book. You think how the camera can move from one place to another, how a sequence can be cut with another sequence, and how a shot can be cut with another shot. If you want to sum-up a storyboard, it's a visual script.'

PROSTHETIC OXEN

One of his recent jobs was *Alien III*, which has seen a lot of script and personnel changes, and Asbury was not the only storyboarder involved. 'I worked eight months on it, with the third director, and there were umpteen scripts. The first director couldn't do it for some reason and the second was fired. After I finished, another storyboard artist, Bill Stallion, was brought in. When I last spoke to him he was still expecting the final thirty pages, and the film was half-way through shooting!

'The original script was rewritten by the director who was fired, and was going to take place on a planet made entirely of wood. The planet was built by an order of monks, if your mind can accept that, and this is shown via a series of intercuts through the credits.'

In *Alien III* something goes wrong with the ship in which Ripley and the others escaped at the end of *Aliens*. Asbury takes up the storyline: 'They're in suspended animation when the ship jetsions them in tiny lifeboats. But the alien has got into the one carrying Ripley and Newt, which crashes on this wooden planet. It lands in the sea and is found by a monk when it gets washed ashore. Everyone except Ripley is dead, including Newt. The monks use oxen to pull the ship ashore. One of these oxen goes down, but you don't see what strikes it. Of course that's the alien.

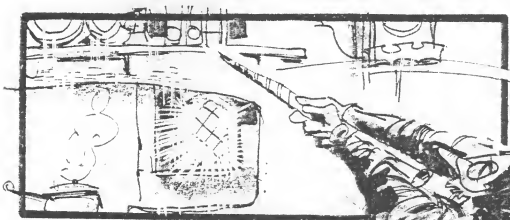
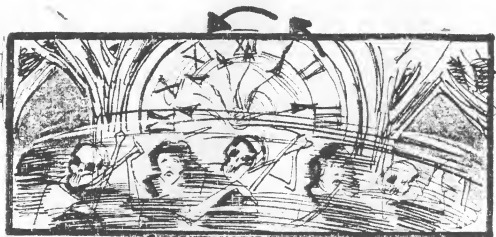
'The monks take Ripley underground, because the planet is howling wind above surface. There are termites and lice everywhere. While the funeral of Newt takes place in the furnace of a huge works, you cross-cut with the abattoir, where the dead oxen suddenly jerks open and this foul thing falls out. We're up and running then, with an alien the size of a cow. It has four legs and travels at 40 miles an hour. The prosthetics they were doing for *Alien III* were wonderful stuff.

'Then the script was changed and it became a concrete planet. In fact it's a penal colony, and the inhabitants became convicts rather than monks.'

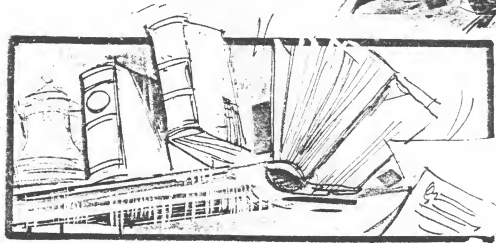




The
figures
on the
clock
chase
each
other
in
reverse
and
the
hands
spin
backwards



Blix sweeps
on....



Books
plotted
etc.





Martin Asbury started the visualization process on the Tom Cruise vehicle *Legend* (above), while detailed black and white storyboards (left) in which character actions are shown with arrows. Note the detail from the close-up rectangle in picture one is replicated in picture two

work because she'd be dead by then. As we kept pointing out! Anyway, the director and I worked out a fantastic ending, then we were told it was very similar to the end of *Terminator II* and wasn't going to be allowed. I don't know whether it will or not, now I'm off it.

'The dead oxen suddenly jerks open and this foul thing falls out. We're up and running then, with an alien the size of a cow'

R.I.P. RIPLEY

One plot element he worked on seems to have been left unchanged: Ripley is herself infected by an alien. That's still there. I storyboarded it. In fact the director claimed that's how he got the job. He said: Ripley must die at the end of this.

They wanted the alien to burst from her as she threw herself into the furnace, and that she'd hold it aloft in triumph as she fell, taking it with her. Of course that wouldn't

I'm glad in a way I'm off it. It wasn't an unhappy experience because I love drawing and I liked the people I worked with. It was the constant changes which were slightly aggravating. I like working under pressure and I like working hard, but I can't do it continually, and it was beginning to look like it

was going to be continuous.'

Was this a case of too many cooks? 'I'm sure of it. I hesitate to say this, but money men now seem to be in control of the studios rather than film makers. They know if they release a film called *Alien III* in all the cinemas in America people are going to see it out of pure curiosity. They're going to make millions of dollars. So they don't actually care what the picture's like. That's cynical but I'm afraid it's the way people are working at the moment. They calculate the profits they'll make before shooting the film and don't want to exceed the pre-ordained budget.

'One of the reasons Universal pulled the plug on *Charlie Chaplin* was because they caught a cold on *Havana*. That ran away with itself and went over sixty million, and that's why they were scared about *Charlie Chaplin*.'

Given the enormous costs, constant changes and front office interference, it's amazing films ever get made at all. 'It amazes us too,' Martin Asbury admits. 'But I love film work and that's part of the reason I continue to do it.'

Alien III does not as yet have a release date. But as soon as it does we'll be printing some of the storyboards which Martin Asbury produced for it.

SWEET DREAMS OF DESPAIR



The award winning comics writer Neil Gaiman explains how he approaches the task of scripting Sandman every month. James Wallis reports...

Ten years ago, someone who said that they wrote comics was assumed to be the person who lettered the word balloons and sound effects. Today people know and understand the distinction between writers and artists, and between pencillers and inkers. Readers now realize that comics have to be scripted before they can be drawn, but scripting probably suffers from more of the I-could-do-that syndrome than any other form of writing. Comics scripting has yet to be recognized as a craft, and it is as a craftsman that Neil Gaiman exemplifies the profession.

Gaiman's comics scripts carry a stylistic badge that identify them as products of his unique imagination. He was part of the British invasion of the American comics industry in the mid to late 1980s, and along with his British co-conspirators he has been

stealthily reprogramming the minds of the youth of America ever since. His comics, which include *Black Orchid*, *The Books Of Magic* and *Sandman*, work on a more subtle level than most, mixing atmosphere and characterization in a careful blend which often seems to have little to do with plot at all. Above all his stories are atmospheric, and it is an atmosphere which he manages to sustain regardless of which artist is drawing the comic. Neil Gaiman writes comics that disturb.

'It's all what it does in the back of your head.' Gaiman leans back in his chair, one arm hanging carelessly with its fingers pointing downwards. 'I don't want *Sandman* to be the kind of book where you flinch and squeal when you turn the page. I want you to wake up three nights later, screaming.' He smiles reassuringly.

'His stories are atmospheric, and it is an atmosphere which he manages to sustain regardless of which artist is drawing the comic. Neil Gaiman writes comics that disturb'

Sandman is published by DC, and is one of the two ongoing comics that Gaiman writes, the other being *Miracleman*. It is not so much a single story as a number of stories that centre around the person of the Sandman, otherwise known as Morpheus, the Lord of Dreams. Now twenty-six issues old, with excellent ratings, a cult following, one collection and several awards to its name, *Sandman* was almost entirely Gaiman's creation and is still very much his baby.

'I knew the kind of comic that I wanted to do. I knew that it was not a regular DC title, in the sense of being unlike anything else they were publishing. And I knew the comics market well enough to know that there was no way in high heaven we would last more than a year. By issue eight the sales would be so pitiful that DC would be forced to scrap it. I didn't even plan mentally ahead of issue eight; it went up to the meeting with Death in the park and that was where it stopped.'

FLESHING OUT THE CHARACTER

Gaiman had a head start on most creators in that he already had a good relationship with DC before he proposed the *Sandman* title. Even so, the proposal ran to around twenty thousand words, with a large wad of attached sketches, and covered only the first eight issues in vague detail.

30 June 1991 FEAR

EXTRACTS FROM NEIL GAIMAN'S SCRIPT FOR SANDMAN #26

Page 3 panel 1

ANOTHER HALF PAGE PANEL. WE'RE NOW DOWN ON THE FLOOR OF THE BANQUETING HALL. IN THE FOREGROUND IS AN AREA OF TABLE. SITTING IN CHAIRS, FACING US, ARE, LEFT TO RIGHT: BES, THE LITTLE EGYPTIAN DWARF GOD; BAST, THE CAT-HEADED GODDESS OF THE EGYPTIANS; THOR — HUGE AND KNOT-MUSCLED AND ALREADY THREE-FOURTHS DRUNK, HIS HAMMER-BESIDE HIS PLATE; AND ON THE FAR SIDE OF THOR, PROBABLY ODIN. BES IS EATING A PLATE OF RICE CAKES; BAST HAS A HUGE STUFFED MOUSE, WITH AN OLIVE IN ITS MOUTH; THOR HAS A WOODEN TRENCHER, WITH A HUGE HUNK OF MEAT ON THE BONE ON IT; ODIN'S COAT CAN BE SEEN AT THE EXTREME RIGHT OF PANEL. THOR ALSO HAS A HUGE GOBLET. HE'S A MESSY — AND QUITE DRUNKEN — EATER. HE HAS BITS OF MEAT IN HIS BEARD — WITH ONE HAND, WHICH HOLDS A LUMP OF MEAT, HE'S REACHING OUT TO ATTRACT BAST'S ATTENTION (SHE'S DOING HER BEST TO IGNORE HIM.) HE'S WAVING THE OTHER HAND AROUND TO ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF A SERVANT. IF WE CAN SEE THE SERVANT COMING TOWARDS HIM, HE'S A YOUNG MAN WEARING STRIPY PAJAMAS, CARRYING A JUG OF WINE. IN THE BACKGROUND, DESCENDING THE STAIRS TOWARDS THE BANQUETING HALL, WE CAN SEE THE SANDMAN AND THE TWO FAIRIES. IF WE CAN SEE THE ROOF OF THE BANQUETING HALL, WE MAY BE ABLE TO SEE THE TWO ANGELS HANGING ALMOST BACK TO BACK ABOUT 20 FEET ABOVE EVERYONE. THEIR WINGS FOLDED. BUT DON'T PUSH IT.

Thor: D'you know who the *mightiest* of the Aesir is, eh? I'll tell you. It's *me*. S'right.

Thor: Ho! More ale over here! And *Step Livey!*

Thor: D'you want to play with my *Hammer*? Eh, Miss Pussy-head? It's called *Mjollnir*. If I *lub* it, it gets bigger. S'true.

Bes — dwarf (small): Just ignore the lout, Bast.

Page 3 panel 2

THREE PANELS ON THE BOTTOM TIER: ONE CONTINUOUS BACKGROUND. WE'RE ACTUALLY EXTENDING RIGHT FROM THE LAST PANEL: FIRST PANEL SHOWS ODIN: HE'S STILL WEARING HIS LONG COAT AND HIS HAT. ON HIS SHOULDER PERCH THE GREY AND INSUBSTANTIAL SHADOWS OF TWO RAVENS (POSSIBLY ON OVERLAY, OR ELSE JUST LIGHT WASH OUTLINES OR VAGUE CROSS-HATCHING). HE'S GOT BOTH HANDS AROUND A HUGE GOBLET. THE ELBOWS REST ON THE TABLE, AND HE'S BROODING. HE'S LOOKING SLIGHTLY TO THE RIGHT, AND TALKING. PERHAPS IN FRONT OF HIM IS A WOODEN TRENCHER, AND ON IT NOTHING MORE THAN A CLEAN BONE.

Odin: You are not *eating*, Loki Wolf's-Father.

The Dream-King's *wines* are good. You should wet your throat, at least.

Page 3 panel 3

WE'RE LOOKING AT THE NEXT DINER DOWN THE TABLE. IT'S LOKI. HE'S POISED, SITTING. THE SPACE IN FRONT OF HIM IS EMPTY. HE'S RESTING HIS HEAD ON HIS CHEEK AS HE STARES AT THE OTHER PEOPLE AT THE BANQUET. EYES FOCUSED ALMOST ON US. HE'S SMILING HIS CROOKED SMILE. HE SEEMS TO BE ENJOYING HIMSELF, AND HE'S HATCHING A PLAN.

Loki: After twelve hundred years? I am out of the *habit* of eating, All-Father, and I fear that *wine* would go to my head.
No. I am content to *watch*.

Page 3 panel 4

NEXT PANEL. MUCH MUCH SHORTER THAN ODIN AND LOKI — SHE'S PROBABLY SITTING IN A SLIGHTLY HIGHER CHAIR, BUT IS STILL SMALL. — IS SHIVERING JEMMY, OUR FOUR-YEAR-OLD GIRL PRINCESS OF CHAOS. IN FRONT OF HER ARE ALL THE IMPLEMENTS OF AN IDEAL CHILDREN'S PARTY — A MOLDED JELLO, SOME SMALL CAKES AND COOKIES, A GLASS OF LEMONADE. SHE'S LOOKING UP AT A SERVANT — A YOUNG MAN IN STRIPED PAJAMAS AND RUMPLED HAIR, AND SHE'S LOOKING CUTE AS A BUTTON. SHE'S STILL WEARING WHATEVER SHE WAS WEARING BEFORE, BUT SHE'S NOT WEARING CLOWN FACE MAKE-UP ANY MORE; SHE'S REMOVED THE NOSE AND THE PAINTED SMILE IS SMUDGED OVER HER LOWER FACE. SHE'S HOLDING A SPOON, AND SHE'S SAYING:

(TODD — I LOVED WHAT YOU DID WITH HER WORD BALLOONS, THE ALMOST MANDELBRÖTT SPLODGES AROUND THEM IN #24.)

Jemmy: Can I have some more *Ice Cream*?

Servant: Certainly, Princess Jemmy.

Jemmy: I *knocwed* you'd say that.



I wrote everything I could think of about who the Sandman was, what he was, what his attitude was going to be like, what his demeanour was going to be like. I did lots of sketches, I got Dave McKean to do some sketches, I got a guy called Lee Bull who works at Titan to do some sketches, I did more sketches, we sent them to Sam Kieth, he did some sketches...

These days, with the title firmly established, the monthly job of scripting the comic has almost settled into a routine. Unlike many writers Gaiman does not make a detailed plan of each issue before he begins to write it.

'I knew the comics market well enough to know that there was no way in high heaven we would last more than a year'

The best place to get ideas is when you're writing. When you're working on something else, you get an idea for something. A lot of the time you simply cannot use the idea yet, so you defer it. Right now if worst came to worst, if I never got another idea again in my life, I could write about four full issues of *Sandman* and probably busk my way through two large storylines. On that level I'm okay.

The problem is not so much getting ideas,

it's developing them properly, and what to do when you start with an idea and realize that it just doesn't work, or won't work in the space you've allotted for it. So far there have been two solutions; to throw what I've done away and start again, or to take the idea and squeeze it down to fit the space I have.

These days I'm confident enough to put a pile of characters on stage secure in the knowledge that I'll know how it ends by the time I get to the end. This is a little like jumping out of an aeroplane in the sure and fond hope that you'll be able to knit yourself a parachute by the time you hit the ground. Every now and again it doesn't happen, at

Gaiman okays Kelley Jones's pencilling before Todd Klein and George Pratt do the lettering and inking

that either diverges from the theme or simply obscures it. I've never junked a whole script, normally because I know that things are going wrong. If I've got up to page ten and I'm really in trouble I will start again. I junk maybe one script in every six.

VISUALIZING THE SCRIPT

A script will typically take two or three weeks to finish, and will be about forty eight typed pages, with an average of two to three panels described on each page. Gaiman follows one of Alan Moore's maxims: that you put in the script everything that you want the artist to know. This can range from long, lyrical descriptions including autobiographical material and sources for visual references to something as simple as 'He looks up'. During this stage of scripting Gaiman produces a version of the comic in miniature: nine pieces of folded paper. As far as he knows other writers don't do this, and nobody other than Gaiman sees this rough version.

It gives me an idea of the shape of the thing. I actually quite like having the adverts in there; they divide things into three acts. It's also so that I know that what I'm asking the artist to do isn't impossible, that it's not going to be boring, that it's going to work visually. If there are sequences I don't need

which point I stop at page 17 and wander around blankly for a few days. Normally I've set up for the ending, it's in the text, but at that point you have to go back and look at what you're trying to say. If you don't have anything to say, then I don't think there is any point in creating a fiction.

So very often if you're running into trouble, it's a matter of working out what you're trying to say. If you're running into trouble it's probably because you're doing something

to do like that, that I can just sit and write in my head, I will.'

Once finished, the script is sent to Karen Berger, Gaiman's editor at DC Comics. The two have a good working relationship.

'Karen goes through and corrects my spelling of the word 'colour'. That's normally the extent of her editorial involvement these days. I know she's always there if I need her. She says she always tries to read a script before the artist has finished drawing it. We've been doing this for three or four years now, and there is a level now by which she trusts me.

'DC gives me more or less free rein. I'm not allowed to talk about masturbation explicitly. I know that because a sequence in *Sandman* 14 where one of the serial killers was talking about masturbating had to be toned down. Karen also cut one line from the speech about necrophilia in *Sandman* 6 because it grossed her out, and she asked me to make it

less explicit. I didn't mind because it made it rather more unpleasant, because you had to imagine what this girl did with the body.'

Gaiman is sent a copy of the pencilled art as soon as it is finished, and can ask for last-minute corrections if something is wrong. This doesn't happen often because of the level of detail in his scripts. Once the pencils have been passed to the inker, Gaiman's involvement in that issue is finished, although by then the script for the next one should be finished and on its way to DC, and so on. How far will the process continue?

'It doesn't continue forever. There is a story which started in *Sandman* 1. That story will stop somewhere around issue 50. It may be that DC will end the book when I walk off it. It may also be that they will bring on the latest up and coming young British tyro. That might cause a lot of strain on my relationship with DC. On one hand it's fairly unthinkable for them to kill off something

when it's still making money. On the other hand they finished *Watchmen* when *Watchmen* finished, and they never did go back and do 'Young Rorschach' or 'The Comedian In Vietnam' and all those comics they wanted to do. So I think I'm in there with a chance.

'I don't want to do a comic which is essentially one-note, because I will get bored. I want a comic that I can do anything in. I can do historicals, I can do SF stories if I want to. If I put in violence it's because there should be violence there. If I put in dark and gloom, I hope I care about it and I hope I'm doing it all for a reason.'

The reason is craftsmanship, and the fact that Gaiman cares enough about what he writes to make no compromises with its quality. His is an example that any aspiring bright young things of comics, and indeed in any other field would do well to follow.



The *Sandman* comic book page is completed by Dan Vozzo's colouring



FEAR FICTION

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By Dan Simmons.
Father Hoyt confronts the Shrike in an extract from the sequel to the award winning *Hyperion*.

37 THE GRAVEYARD BOOGIE

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Swamp rock riffs and hidden power in the chord changes add up to an engrossing old song which packs one hell of a punch.

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A spirited time is had by all, as a few old ghosts are laid to rest and some new ones get extremely boisterous.

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48 BLUE NARCISSUS

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Heartache and machismo; new dimensions in self-love, romance and sensaporn.

52 THE HAND THAT FEEDS

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Forget Band Aid and that warm aura of satisfaction that stems from doing good works, we're moving into a whole new galaxy and wondering whether charity shouldn't begin at home instead.

55 FICTION FILE

Robert Rankin.

SUBMITTING SHORT STORIES TO FEAR

If you have written a short story which fits FEAR's horror, science fiction or fantasy brief, then send it to David Western, Fiction Editor, FEAR, Newfield Ltd, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1JW. Stories should be from 1,000 to 5,000 words long. Please indicate the word count on the front page of your manuscript which should be typed and preferably double spaced. Remember to enclose a daytime telephone number, a good quality photograph of yourself, a 50-word biography, SAE for acknowledgement of receipt of your manuscript and a further SAE for the return of your story should it be deemed unsuitable.

Readers whose stories are being considered for publication will be notified within a few weeks of receipt, but this is not a guarantee that your story will be published. We can only include a small number of stories per issue and it could be a long time, up to eight months, before you receive a decision on whether your story will be published. Letters and phone calls asking for a decision are not welcomed, manuscripts are read in the order in which they are received and final decisions made accordingly.

DAN SIMMONS THE FALL OF HYPERION

A FEAR BOOK EXTRACT

Dan Simmons seems to attract awards in much the same way as the Earth attracts falling bodies. For instance, his widely acclaimed *SF* novel *Hyperion* won the Hugo and the Locus awards for best science fiction novel. And now we've got a taster for you taken from his new book, *The Fall Of Hyperion*, as the assorted company continue on their journey towards destiny and the deadly Shrike.

Colonel Fedmahn Kassad follows Brawne Lamia and Father Hoyt through the dust storm toward the Jade Tomb. He had lied to Lamia; his night visor and sensors worked well despite the electrical discharge flickering around them. Following the two seemed the best chance for finding the Shrike. Kassad remembered the rock-lion hunts on Hebron - one tethered a goat and waited.

Data from the telltales he had set around the encampment flickers on Kassad's tactical display and whispers through his implant. It is a calculated risk to leave Weintraub and his daughter, Martin Silenus and the Consul sleeping there, unprotected except for the automatics and an alarm. But then, Kassad seriously doubts whether he can stop the Shrike anyway. They are all goats, tethered, waiting. It is the woman, the phantom named Moneta, whom Kassad is determined to find before he dies.

The wind has continued to rise, and now it screams around Kassad, reducing normal visibility to zero and pelting his impact armour. The dunes glow with discharge, and miniature lightning crackles around his boots and legs as he strides to keep Lamia's heat signature in clear view. Information flows in from her open comlog. Hoyt's closed channels reveal only that he is alive and moving.

Kassad passes under the outstretched wing of the Sphinx, feeling the weight invisible above him, hanging there like a great boot heel. Then he turns down the valley, seeing the Jade Tomb as an absence of heat in infrared, a cold outline. Hoyt is just entering the hemispherical opening; Lamia is twenty metres behind him. Nothing else moves



in the valley. The telltales from the camp, hidden by night and storm behind Kassad, reveal Sol and the baby sleeping, the Consul lying awake but unmoving, nothing else within the perimeter.

Kassad slips the safety off on his weapon and moves forward quickly, his long legs taking great strides. He would give anything at that second to have access to a spottersat, his tactical channels complete, rather than have to deal with this partial picture of a fragmented situation. He shrugs within his impact armour and keeps moving.

Brawne Lamia almost does not make the final fifteen metres of her voyage to the Jade Tomb. The wind has risen to gale force and beyond, shoving her along so that twice she loses her footing and falls headlong into the sand. The lightning is real now, splitting the sky in great bursts that illuminate the glowing tomb ahead. Twice she tries calling Hoyt, Kassad, or the others, sure that no one could be sleeping through this back at the camp, but her comlog and implants give her only static, their widebands registering gibberish. After the second fall, Lamia gets to her knees and looks ahead; there has been no sign of Hoyt since that brief glimpse of someone moving toward the entrance.

Lamia grips her father's automatic pistol and gets to her feet, allowing the wind to blow her the last few metres. She pauses before the entrance hemisphere.

Whether due to the storm and electrical display or something else, the Jade Tomb is glowing a bright, bilious green which tinges the dunes and makes the skin of her wrists and hands look like something from the grave. Lamia makes a final attempt to raise someone on her comlog and then enters the tomb.

'Lamia grips her father's automatic pistol and gets to her feet, allowing the wind to blow her the last few metres'

Father Lenar Hoyt of the twelve-hundred-year-old Society of Jesus, resident of the New Vatican on Pacem and loyal servant of His Holiness Pope Urban XVI, is screaming obscenities.

Hoyt is lost and in great pain. The wide rooms near the entrance to the Jade Tomb have narrowed, the corridor has wound back on itself so many times, that now Father Hoyt is lost in a series of catacombs, wandering between greenly glowing walls, in a maze he does not remember from the day's explorations or from the maps he has left behind. The pain — pain which has been with him for years, pain which has been his companion since the tribe of the Bikura had implanted the two cruciforms, his own and Paul Duré's — now threatens to drive him mad with its new intensity.

The corridor narrows again. Lenar Hoyt screams, no longer aware that he is doing so, no longer aware of the words

he cries out — words which he has not used since childhood. He wants release. Release from the pain. Release from the burden of carrying Father Duré's DNA, personality... Duré's soul... in the cross-shaped parasite on his back. And from carrying the terrible curse of his own foul resurrection in the cruciform on his chest.

But even as Hoyt screams, he knows that it was not the now-dead Bikura who had condemned him to such pain; the lost tribe of colonists, resurrected by their own cruciforms so many times that they had become idiots, mere vehicles for their own DNA and that of their parasites, had been priests also... priests of the Shrike.

Father Hoyt of the Society of Jesus has brought a vial of holy water blessed by His Holiness, a Eucharist consecrated in a Solemn High Mass, and a copy of the Church's ancient rite of exorcism. These things are forgotten now, sealed in a Perspex bubble in a pocket of his cloak.

Hoyt stumbles against a wall and screams again. The pain is a force beyond description now, the full ampoule of ultramorph he had shot only fifteen minutes earlier, helpless against it. Father Hoyt screams and claws at his clothes, ripping off the heavy cloak, the black tunic and Roman collar, pants and shirt and underclothes, until he is naked, shivering with pain and cold in the glowing corridors of the Jade Tomb and screaming obscenities into the night.

He stumbles forward again, finds an opening, and moves into a room larger than any he remembers from the day's searches there. Bare translucent walls rise thirty metres on each side of an empty space. Hoyt stumbles to his hands and knees, looks down, and realizes that the floor has become almost transparent. He is staring into a vertical shaft beneath the thin membrane of floor; a shaft that drops a kilometre or more to flames. The room fills with the red-orange pulse of light from the fire so far below.

Hoyt rolls to his side and laughs. If this is some image of hell summoned up for his benefit, it is a failure. Hoyt's view of hell is tactile; it is the pain which moves in him like jagged wires pulled through his veins and guts. Hell is also the memory of starving children in the slums of Armaghast and the smile of politicians sending boys off to die in colonial wars. Hell is the thought of the Church dying out in his lifetime, in Duré's lifetime, the last of its believers a handful of old men and women filling only a few pews of the huge cathedrals on Pacem. Hell is the hypocrisy of saying morning Mass with the evil of the cruciform pulsating warmly, obscenely, above one's head.

There is a rush of hot air, and Hoyt watches as a section of floor slides back, creating a trapdoor to the shaft below. The room fills with the stench of sulphur. Hoyt laughs at the cliché, but within seconds the laughter turns to sobs. He is on his knees now, scraping with bloodied nails at the cruciforms on his chest and back. The cross-shaped welts seem to glow in the red light. Hoyt can hear the flames below.

'Hoyt!'

Still sobbing, he turns to see the woman — Lamia — framed in the doorway. She is looking past him, beyond him, and raising an antique pistol. Her eyes are very wide.

Father Hoyt feels the heat behind him, hears the roar as of a distant furnace, but above that, he suddenly hears the slide and scrape of metal on stone. Footsteps. Still clawing at the bloodied welt on his chest, Hoyt turns, his knees rubbed raw against the floor.

'The pain is a force beyond description now, the full ampoule of ultramorph he had shot only fifteen minutes earlier, helpless against it'

He sees the shadow first: ten metres of sharp angles, thorns, blades... legs like steel pipes with a rosette of scimitar blades at the knees and ankles. Then, through the pulse of hot light and black shadow, Hoyt sees the eyes. A hundred facets... a thousand... glowing red, a laser shone through twin rubies, above the collar of steel thorns and the quick-silver chest reflecting flame and shadow...

Brawne Lamia is firing her father's pistol. The slap of the shots echo high and flat above the furnace rubble.

Father Lenar Hoyt swivels toward her, raises one hand. 'No, don't!' he screams. 'It grants one wish! I have to make a...'

The Shrike, which was *there* — five metres away — is suddenly here, an arm's length from Hoyt. Lamia quits firing. Hoyt looks up, sees his own reflection in the fire-burnished chrome of the thing's carapace... sees something else in the Shrike's eyes at that instant... and then it is gone, the Shrike is gone, and Hoyt lifts his hand slowly, touches his throat almost bemusedly, stares for a second at the cascade of red which is covering his hand, his chest, the cruciform, his belly...

He turns toward the doorway and sees Lamia still staring in terror and shock, not at the Shrike now, but at him, at Father Lenar Hoyt of the Society of Jesus, and in that instant he realizes that the pain is gone, and he opens his mouth to speak, but more, only more red comes out, a geyser of red. Hoyt glances down again, notices for the first time that he is naked, sees the blood dripping from his chin and chest, dripping and pouring to the now-dark floor, sees the blood pouring as if someone had upended a bucket of red paint, and then he sees nothing as he falls face first to the floor so far... so very far... below.

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Derek Rutherford

THE GRAVEYARD BOOGIE

You've got to understand: we all thought the guy was crazy. There we were, six struggling musicians, struggling to stay alive that is. Not struggling with the music — we had the music down pat, a gorgeous blend of New Orleans shuffle and Cajun, with a sprinkling of blues on top. Soul stew, man! But we couldn't eat the music, and the music never put petrol in the van or replaced burnt out power-amps, so we spent our days and nights rolling up and down the motorways from one cheap gig to the next, free beer and a meal on the house if we were lucky and the gods had their boogie hats on. Until, one day, there he was.

Walking in on us with dust on his coat and on his boots, and his hair silver and thin and mostly missing, his eyes dark and sunken, and burnt skin tight across his bones. His fingers were long and gnarled and calloused. He looked about a hundred years old, yet moved like he was just seventy. An old man. Yet he could sing like a young bird flying for the very first time. We were playing on a boat, an old Thames sailing barge refitted as a restaurant. There were maybe fifty or sixty people in there getting chilli all around their mouths and tapping their feet to the music. It was July the fourth and despite the fact that there was a whole ocean between us and the US of A most of them were getting it on and celebrating like it was the Brits who had won that particular war.

There were steps leading down into the boat — we were playing below the waterline — old wooden steps that were a little perilous when you were young, let alone for an old guy with damp soles and a walking stick. He stopped halfway down and looked across at us, his eyes hidden deep in their sockets making it impossible to outstare the guy. Creep! I looked back down at my fingers and fumbled a couple of chords. By half-time we'd forgotten all about him. We sat around a table working out an order of play for the second set when all of a sudden he was right behind me and he said in a soft warm voice (and I'd have put money on it coming from anyone but him) would we like a gig?

Leave it out, Grandad,' Mark said, although he was laughing as he said it so as not to upset the old man.

'I mean it,' the dusty old guy told us, and we laughed and went back to writing out a set.

'How much are you getting tonight?'

No one answered and because I felt sorry for him I twisted round in my chair. Up close his skin was like tree bark. His teeth the colour of corn. 'Not a lot,' I told him. 'But they're feeding us, know what I mean?'

He nodded and I knew he understood. He'd been there too.

'So how about five hundred pounds?' he asked.

I smiled because you get this type of thing every night: 'I'm in the business myself, got a few contacts, maybe I can get you a gig?'. My brother knows the guitar player from such-and-such a band. Maybe I can get you a gig?'. My name's Elvis Presley, maybe you want a gig?'. We'd had them all in our time. You humour them because you want them back at the next gig — in our niche in the world of rock 'n' roll you want every two-headed tattooed lady and her freak brother at the next gig. More bodies, more beer. More beer, more money. So I smiled and he knew what I was thinking because, as I said, he'd been there himself. But still he didn't give up.

'All you've got to do is play one of my songs,' he told me. 'Just one. The rest of it's up to you. Five hundred pounds.'

Mark looked up from the set list. 'What did he say?'

'He wants to give us five hundred pounds to sing one of his songs.'

Mark peered at the old guy and raised his eyebrows as if to ask if this was true, or maybe was this guy crazy?

The old man nodded.

'When is this gig?'

The old guy shrugged. 'You say you'll do it, I book something up.'

I looked at Mark. He shrugged too. I looked at the old man. 'Well do it,' I said. Five hundred pounds. That was a lot of money back then. Like I said, we thought the old guy was crazy.

He stayed until the end of the gig and when all of the happy eaters had left and chairs were suddenly appearing upside down on tables he showed us his song. Man, where that sucker came from was anybody's guess, but the son-of-a-bitch had a classic up his sleeve. Swamp-rock grooving to a heartbeat, simple chords cutting across a rhythm felt rather than heard. Voodoo words.

Something from the deep South. A pulse that matched the flow of blood through our veins. A chorus swelling up from nowhere and reaching higher and higher until only the moon was brighter.

Yeah, he sang like a bird flying. He played that song over and over and each time it was exactly the same. But it never became boring, it never became dull. Each time it hit a nerve. Maybe he had played it a thousand times (and later I began to wonder if he had played it to every band he had ever seen and we were the first who had ever been able to play it back to him) and had pared it down to its perfect form. I'll never forget the look in his eyes when we started to gel on his song. We played it differently to him, naturally. We had guitar and piano, bass and drums. He just used a single guitar. But we caught the spirit and the soul and the essence of the song. His eyes brightened, colour flowed into his cheeks. He smiled, and he didn't look like the type of guy who did that very often. And then best of all, he pulled out a wad of notes from those old road clothes that looked like they'd fallen off the back of a lorry and been dragged behind, and reeled off two hundred and fifty pounds worth.

'Fifty per cent now. Fifty per cent on the night.'

Then he left us kicking around and jamming on his song and I'll be damned if it wasn't just about the best song I'd ever played in my life.

The gig reinforced our idea of how crazy this old man was. He booked us into a ramshackle village hall in the middle of nowhere and didn't tell anyone about it until the night before. We got the word out to a few friends but at nine o'clock when Mark was counting in the first number there weren't even enough people watching to make a rugby team. Embarrassing. But for two hundred and fifty quid we put up with red faces.

We kept his song for the end. We'd all agreed that we had nothing we could follow it with. In fact, we all agreed that it was a song we wanted to keep in the set for good. Half-time, and I asked the old man what his name was.

He looked suspicious. 'When are you going to play my song?' he asked.

'It's the last song of the night,' I told him.

'If you don't play it you don't get paid.'

'Easy,' I said. 'It's the best damn song I've heard in a long time. Not only do we want to play it tonight, we want to play it every night.'

He relaxed and smiled again. 'You like my song, yeah?'

'It's why I need to know your name,' I said. 'One day... you never know, one day we might record it.'

His smile broke into a laugh. 'One day a lot of things might happen.'

'I'm serious,' I said. 'We've got plans.'

'You're good enough,' he said. 'But sometimes that's not enough.' Looking at him, I knew how true that was. One song, all we'd heard, and he could have been another Hank Williams, another Jimmie Rogers. A legend. Instead he was a tramp. A homeless and lost soul. A wanderer. Coast to coast, city to city. Genius inside. Cold outside.

'So what's your name?' I asked.

'Forget it.'

'No. I want to know.'



'Robert,' he said finally.

'Robert what?'

'Just Robert.'

'Come on.'

He shook his head. 'You make any money from my song you keep it.'

'What's the matter, you on the run or something?'

'You could say that.'

'I let it ride. The guy was crazy.'

A few more people wandered in as the second set progressed. Locals, probably, drawn by the sounds like moths to light. By the time we hit the old man's song the crowd was almost respectable. It was the sort of gig I'd done for free when I was fourteen, and then, fourteen years later, some old guy was paying hundreds to hear his song brought to life.

Mark counted it in. We'd christened it The Graveyard Boogie because the old guy had no name for it. The snare-drum and guitar introduced the rhythm. The bass and piano fleshing out the chords. A groove settled and Mark started to sing. Heads turned. Conversations stopped. Everybody knew that this song was a killer.

We were funky. Growling deep down in those low registers. Screaming up in the high. Counterpoint melodies, harmonies, and all the time the pulse matching our blood flow, the bass drum our heartbeat. A New Orleans funeral march, up-tempo and jazzy. An African war dance, dark and mean. A Chicago blues crying for help. Hendrix-guitar up there searching for life among the stars. And all the time, the pulse. I caught sight of the man at the back of the hall. He was grinning and tapping his foot. I wished I'd thought to set up a tape-player. There was something in the air tonight. We hit the middle eight as if it was a song we'd practiced all our lives. I saw Pete and Marty, the rhythm section, smiling at one another. So what if there was hardly anyone there. This was Heaven. With a song like this we could go all the way. Another verse. The chorus. Take it down low, build up a little tension, once around the houses down there, low and funky and then build it back up. Higher and higher, the guitar snatching at the chords a micro-second early to give the impression of quickening without changing the tempo. Real pro stuff. Another chorus. A false ending then hit it for real. Graveyard Boogie, children. Eat your hearts out.

They clapped like it was the Beatles up there. We all looked around at each other. That song was out of this world.

We played an encore, a steaming version of Let's Twist Again, because there was nothing but an up-tempo dance song that would come close to living with The Graveyard Boogie. As we finished I looked across at the old man.

He had company. A younger guy. A good looking chap, tall and slim. A smart business suit. Dark hair. Good skin. Cheek bones that cameras would love. I bet the women went for this guy.

As I watched, Robert gave the younger man a bundle of money. He nodded in our direction as if to say 'Can you give this to the band?' and then he turned and headed for the door, walking as quickly as I had seen. At the door I swear he stopped and gave us one last look, a sad look. An apologetic look. Then

he was gone.

The other guy wasted no time. He came straight across to the stage, money in his hand. He was even better looking up-close, his teeth shone, his skin had a healthy glow to it, his eyes twinkled.

'Good gig, lads,' he said.

'Thank you.'

'Listen, Robert had to leave early. He asked me to give you this.' He held out the money and I took it without thinking. What was I supposed to think anyway? But the moment it was in my grasp a coldness gripped my heart. I shivered. Something more than money had passed between us.

**'Many times I
caught sight of
one of the boys
looking over his
shoulder as if
someone had
called to him or
had run a finger
up his spine'**

'I loved The Graveyard Boogie,' he told us.

I wasn't sure but hadn't the old man been alone when we had played that number? Maybe this guy had been elsewhere in the room. Though there hadn't really been enough people in there to have hidden anyone and I sure hadn't noticed this guy.

'It's one of the old man's songs,' I said.

The good looking guy smiled. 'Is that what he told you?'

'How do you mean?'

He shook his head, dismissing the subject. 'Keep playing boys. I'll see you again.' Then he left. What was it with us? Attracting all the nuts.

♦♦♦♦♦

One: I split the money with the rest of the boys and each time I handed some over I swear they shivered.

♦♦♦♦♦

Two: Driving home it suddenly struck me that Mark had introduced the old man's song as 'a number a stranger showed us just the other night.' He never once mentioned our title for it.

I couldn't say that things went downhill from there. I couldn't say they picked up either, though every time we played The Graveyard Boogie, even the dead crowds came to life. We kept hitting the highways and kept getting ripped off by tight promoters. Eventually, the band split. It was a long time ago and I can't recall the reasons. I don't think we ever felt right with one another again.

And someone was following us.

We never saw anyone. In fact, we never even mentioned the idea out loud, but we all knew. Many times I caught sight of one of the boys looking over his shoulder as if someone had called to him or had run a finger up his spine. It hap-

pened to me, too. Driving the van, checking the rear-view mirror for something that wasn't there. Footsteps in empty rehearsal rooms. Shadows where there shouldn't have been shadows. It could have been imagination. But surely not for all of us? It started to play on our nerves. And so finally the band split.

I played guitar for a million groups. After that, a week here, a month there. Always trying to keep body and soul together and, bit by bit, failing. I never ever achieved that feeling again that we had had with The Graveyard Boogie. I played it to various bands across the years but nobody seemed to pick up on it the way we had done. One time, in North London, a group of lads almost hit the groove. I felt a lifting of the soul, my heartbeat grew lighter, but they couldn't keep the time. It started to become an obsession - find a band who could play The Boogie. I let my own performances slip and spent my time wandering bars and clubs looking for guys who would be able to cope with it. There was nothing complicated about the song, no trick chords or unusual notes, just the pulse of blood through veins that had to be right. And yet no one could play it.

I was maybe five hundred miles from the place I had once called home when I met up with Crazy Montgomery Jones and his Alabama Playboys. They were playing in the backroom of a tired pub to less than forty people. Blues songs and soul standards that had been old in my time and were now twenty years older still. I stood at the back and nursed a steadily warming pint of the black stuff. Then at half-time I asked these boys what they were getting.

'Not a lot. But free beer,' the drummer told me.

I smiled. This was somewhere I'd been before. Only back then I had been the one about to be seduced by a song.

'You wanna do a gig for five hundred pounds?' I asked.

He laughed. I got the impression he thought I was crazy.

♦♦♦♦♦

Time is a funny thing. I don't think they played it as well as we used to. They laid down a more modern treatment. Whammy bars and sonic distortion. More notes. But they hit the pulse. I shivered and for a moment I thought that whatever had been following me all these years had moved up and was standing alongside me. I glanced to my left. No one there. My right. No one.

Montgomery Jones, or whatever his real name was, loved the song. He told me it was the best thing they'd heard. Ever. I would have said the same for five hundred pounds, but I think they meant it.

I booked up a Friday night at a local community centre. I thought back to that date we'd done all those years ago when, due to the non-existent advertising, nobody came. I took the liberty of spending twenty pounds on an advert in the local press. What the hell, it wasn't my cash anyway. I owed a man down South a lot of money. More now, with the interest. I bet if he ever caught up with me the repayment might involve a couple of broken legs. But I needed the money for an occasion such as this, and

the odds on the money lender catching up with a man on the road like myself were pretty low. Anyway, two broken legs seemed a damn sight better than having whatever it was that was behind me following me for the rest of my life.

They played well. The crowd was respectable if not superb, and by the end of the night when The Alabama Playboys launched into The Graveyard Boogie most of them were up and dancing. The song was still a killer.

Then something happened to me.

I can't say what. It was nothing specific. A lightening of worries maybe. A loosening of the soul. Somewhere around the middle eight I started to feel good. As if I had thought of something pleasant and then forgotten exactly what, knowing only that there was pleasure to come. As the guitar player began a solo I found myself smiling. I tapped my foot. They had the beat, the pulse. All eight of them. They all had the pulse now. Voodoo. Something made me think of voodoo.

I reached into my coat pocket, it was an old coat, an Austrian Army greatcoat from the 50s, thick and warm and cheap from the surplus store. It served me well out in the cold nights. I drew out the money. Money well spent. I hadn't felt this good in years.

'You want me to give the money to the band?'

I looked to my left. He hadn't changed a bit. He was still tall and dark and good-looking, just as I had remembered him. He had told us he would see us again.

I nodded. The son-of-a-bitch hadn't even aged. He took the money from my hand. I tried to look him in the eye, but couldn't. He laughed, and, I'm ashamed to say it, but I scuttled away like a scared cat, almost knocking several people over on my way to the door. With some distance between us, I stopped and took a last look at the band. The guitar player was staring at me kind of funny. What could I do? I smiled thinly, shrugged an apology and left. It was the first time I'd been on my own for years.

Outside I caught sight of myself, a reflection in a car window. I had a beard now, speckled with grey. My hair was long and untidy. My coat dusty. My boots worn. A real road man. A real old man. But at least I was free.

I headed west. For the first time in a long time I got to thinking about the old band. I wondered if anyone else had ever found someone who could play The Graveyard Boogie the way we could. One thing I knew, if they hadn't, they would never stop searching.

And they would never stop looking over their shoulders, either.

DEREK RUTHERFORD was born in Gloucester. He has had several short stories published, though not in any magazines you're ever likely to see again. He plays guitar in a blues band and was in fact playing on an old Thames sailing barge on July 4th. The old man wasn't there, but there were a couple of strangers in the audience...

FICTION FILE 41

ROBERT CHARLES WILSON



Robert Charles Wilson is fast becoming one of the quiet heroes of science fiction, writes Liz Holliday.

Without a great deal of publisher's hype Wilson has managed to establish, with his first four novels, his ability to deliver a damn good read in various subgenres of the field.

The cover of *Gypsies*, Wilson's third book which is only now seeing print in Britain, compares his work to that of the late, great Theodore Sturgeon. 'Sturgeon is obviously an influence. He's someone I've read and appreciated. You know, when you ask for influences on an author's own work, it's not always easy to do. But Sturgeon, I would say, is one of those people. I find myself going back often to certain writers of the 50s, like Sturgeon and William Tenn. I suppose what we would now call humanist writers who worked at that time; but the time when they influenced me was when I was very young and reading their work. I think he's part of that.'

'There are certain writers who are just a little bit off beat. I suppose that you could say out of the mainstream of science fiction — Daniel Keyes I get compared to occasionally. I'm not talking about mainstream writers. I'm talking about people who manage to stand just a little bit apart from the science fiction tradition, yet work within it. It's something I like to imagine myself doing.'

Wilson's work is striking for its strong use of the interior voice, a mode not common in a genre which sometimes focuses to its detriment on hardware: 'I like to think

that my work is opening up a little bit. I certainly don't want to lose that, because I think that something central to what I'm doing is looking at things from an interior perspective. My own criticism of my work, in retrospect, would be that there's a certain narrowness to it, connected to its interior quality.'

'I think that one of the most interesting things about science fiction is that we can look at strange events through the eyes of someone sympathetic, someone that we can identify with. Science fiction has always provided the marvellous in great detail, but it hasn't always provided that perspective on it.'

Wilson also deals with the concept of the self as a construct of society: 'I think that's one of the things science fiction is set up to do, among others. I mean, when we're dealing with aliens, what we're really talking about — in part — is the nature of humanity. Similarly, when we are talking about the future, what we have to consider is what's continuous in human nature throughout time, and what isn't. You know: what can be acted upon by social forces, and what can't.'

If I had a criticism of Wilson's earliest work it was that the interior voice he used for his characters was a little too lyrical, and therefore not in keeping with their midwestern backgrounds. It is a fault he soon overcame: 'I think that's a legitimate observation. I like lyrical writing. I'm very moved by it. What I really want to do is put it in an authentic context, which is not the easiest thing to do. One of the things I'm trying to do is to be as honest as I can be towards my characters, and not misrepresent them. The lyrical elements of my work are important to me, but I want them to be within a realistic context.'

CRIES FROM THE DEEP

By
John Green

Why do I bother with all this, Richard asked himself for the third time? The auditorium was filling up now, people jostled past him to grab the few remaining front seats. He sat in the fourth row, his tape recorder waiting on his lap, notepad in hand. He glanced to the back of the hall watching the files of people enter, the large poster caught his eye.

JESSIE STRAKE - MEDIUM RARE. The true story of the medium of the century. Buy Jessie's remarkable book now! The voice of the departed. Richard smirked to himself, how many times had he heard the same preposterous claims made?

For eight years he had worked for the Psychic Investigation Society, he'd probably seen at least sixty mediums in that time, all as useless as each other. Some out and out frauds, others well-meaning grannies whose beliefs convinced them that the dead had every wish to converse with the living. Harmless, sure, but stupid anyway.

The seats were all full now and the doors closed. The man next to Richard coughed loudly. Richard glanced down at the glossy programme he'd bought at the door, he began to read.

Jessie Strake has proved herself a most remarkable medium. Unlike her contemporaries who pick up their messages while conscious Jessie enters a trance-like state where she is taken over by spirits of the dead.

She has caused much interest in the psychic world with her messages of importance, predictions of disasters, and her celebrated help in the Wolfman murder case.

It was true, she had made front page news after she pin-pointed the whereabouts of the flesh-eating psychopath, the Wolfman, and helped bring about his arrest; he had even committed suicide whilst in custody, confirming his guilt in the public eye.

Richard was still unconvinced though. He'd heard many mediums, most giving trivial details such as 'Uncle George wants you to know he is all right' or 'Brian hid the money under the mattress, dear'. A few though, like Jessie, had given important details but not one stood up to Richard's strict investigations. He was sure Jessie would be no exception.

'Have you seen her before?' The man who had coughed nudged Richard, pointing at the brochure.

'No, no this is the first time.' Richard smiled and turned back. The man was rather greasy looking, the dim spotlight reflecting off his balding head and Richard did not fancy continuing the conversation.

'I couldn't help noticing the tape recorder, are you a reporter? I'm with the Granchester Gazette. Barry Collins.' He held out his hand; reluctantly Richard shook it.

'Richard Jarvie. I'm a psychic investigator,' he hated saying that, it always led to further annoying questions.

The man's beady eyes narrowed visibly. 'Oh really. Perhaps I could ask you for a comment afterwards, I'm sure my readers would be most interested at an expert's opinion.'

Richard nodded and made a mental note to leave before the lights went up. The man continued, 'How did you get into that lark then?'

'Oh just interest,' he lied. He wasn't going to tell this idiot his personal life. Richard could already see this Barry making mental notes about him. 'Tall, swarthy good-looking investigator says Jessie show is bunk.' That was the usual standard of local press reporting on his work, how he hated their entire breed.

Thankfully the last few lights went out and some worn-out PA began to play a scratched copy of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring. Sunlight still pierced the green

and blue striped curtains that covered the windows running the length of the Granchester Assembly Hall.

Slowly the red velvet curtains creaked back and there was an awe-struck silence as Jessie came into view. Although Richard had seen the publicity shots of her she seemed even larger than life standing before him. She was enormous, about twenty-two stone in a blue and white dress that looked as though it had been made to live in rather than wear. She had a halo of blonde curls and penetrating blue eyes that seemed to single Richard out, even at four rows back.

She walked up to the microphone and folded her bloated arms that were mottled like salami.

'Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for coming.' Her voice was strangely quiet in contrast to her body. Her voluminous chest promised a voice like an opera singer yet it was more like a shy young girl speaking.

'I'd just like to thank you all for the cards and letters you have sent me since I assisted the police with their murder investigation. You are all very sweet. In a moment I shall attempt to enter a trance and see if there are any messages for any of you, please speak up if you recognize you are being talked to. There will be time for questions afterwards. Thank you.'

She curtsied and moved further back on the stage where a table and a chair were positioned. She sat at the chair and began to breathe deeply and slowly, shutting her eyes and relaxing.

Richard was already making notes. He had written down the words 'attempt to enter a trance' as a good sign. Most totally fraudulent mediums entered one every time they performed; a genuine one, or one who believed herself to be, occasionally had an off-day.

Jessie began to sway slowly on the chair which creaked noisily under her bulk. A single spotlight made her flesh seem even whiter against the blackness of the rest of the stage. A low moan escaped her lips and then a noise like she was gargling. She was rocking faster now, her breath coming out in a mist despite the warmth of the hall.

'Amy. Amy. It's George.' A deep, bass voice rang out from Jessie, her eyes still tight shut. 'Amy are you here?'

'George. George is that you?' It was a tearful voice from the back, Richard turned and saw an old woman, hunched up and afraid dabbing her eyes with a lace hanky. 'It's him,' she was mouthing to her companions.

'Amy, don't believe Albert, he did it. Let the police deal with it.' The voice boomed its message from Jessie's depths. A cry of recognition rang out from the old woman and her companions hustled her out sobbing. The reporter next to Richard turned to him and nodded, obviously impressed. Richard wasn't - he'd seen plenty of similar set ups, convincing yet meaningless. He would have to talk to all those who'd been picked later and see if he could corroborate their stories.

He turned back to face the stage and Jessie's eyes were flicking rapidly now, deepening her trance. Her lips pursed and a shrill voice, the voice of an old woman emerged.

'Beryl, Beryl. Don't take the bus tomorrow. Walk. Listen to your old Mum.' The audience all began to look round, seeing if anyone recognized the voice. A middle-aged woman, her black hair tied up in a bun, looked at the floor. She seemed as if she had known the voice and was too embarrassed to show it. Richard made a note of where she sat, to ask her about it later. Suddenly a baby's cry turned all heads to the front again, tears were streaming from Jessie's eyes as the heart-rending cry of a new-born baby came from her mouth, filling the hall with its sorrow. Richard felt his stomach turn over. This was new to him, this cry, unable to speak or understand, chilled his blood.

Mediums were usually so cosy, a friendly chat with old friends was the atmosphere they tried to conjure, but this sound, a solitary cry, went nowhere to explain the mystery of life after death, only confused it.

As suddenly as it had started the cry stopped, abruptly in 'mid-shriek as though ended by a sudden blow. The room suddenly felt colder, people huddled into their coats for warmth.

Jessie was sinking lower in the chair now, a green phosphorescent glow added to the marshmallowy haze that swum about her. It looked fake but the authentic sound of the baby had given a sinister credibility to it.

Suddenly her eyes snapped open. The pupils had disappeared underneath, just the whites showing. Her whole skin seemed to be moving now, changing. Wrinkles pulled up from smooth skin, her whole face taking on a deathly pallor. The shape of her face narrowed, maybe a trick of the lights, but there was a familiarity about the face that unsettled Richard. It reminded him of a corpse, lying clothed, waiting for the relatives to pay respect. That high forehead, skeletal face it was... it was his father.

He felt a pang in his stomach as fear overtook him for the first time in twelve years. He stared, unable to blink as Jessie took on his father's countenance. Short intakes of breath seared up his nostrils, bellowing up the fire in his head.

'Richard, calm down laddie, you're grown up now. Keep a hold on yourself.' The voice. His voice, a Scottish lilt, this was no fake, no well researched snipe at him. It was his father, the moment he had dreaded and searched for.

His mind found a thousand phrases he wanted to say to his father, his mouth failed him on every one. In his mind's eye he saw the full picture. His father lying in state, the coffin, lidless, in the lounge of his house. How he had prayed, prayed for forgiveness. He had only been young, he knew his father was sick, he had been to keep an eye on him. He had only slipped out for an hour, to see Jayne, she only lived down the road yet maybe... Maybe...

'Maybe if you hadn't seen her I'd still be here. Is that it Laddie?' The voice boomed out, as it used to boom up the stairs if he'd been playing too loudly. Death stroked an icy finger down Richard's back. For a second he was that young boy, playing with his train in that cold, old attic room, shouting and laughing until that voice called. Knowing it

would be followed by loud footsteps up the stairs, that his father would burst in, red-faced with passionate anger, slipper in hand. A tear rolled down his cheek, whether from fear or remorse he didn't know.

Cold reason returned to Richard's head. Jessie couldn't know all this, his voice, his face, it was all there. There was some sort of life after death and he now knew it as a fact. All those years, trying to find a way of asking his father's forgiveness for neglecting him that day. All those fakes and frauds he'd consulted and been humiliated by, that had turned into his quest to debunk every medium alive, his life's work and it ended here, cruelly and startlingly.

He had come home that day and his father dead, hanging half out of bed, vomit on his lips as though he had tried to cry out for help. The help that couldn't come because he had gone to see Jayne. He had tried to cope with it, blaming Jayne, ending the love between them, and now, his father was here to confront him.

'Richard, keep a hold of yourself boy. I died in my sleep. You couldn't have done anything. Forgive yourself, laddie.' The words seemed to hang in the air. Richard slumped in his chair, hit by them. All this time, and all wasted. He had tortured himself all these years, waiting for retribution and now it was all over. He began to cry, his face stunned, the tears flowing unstoppered down his cheeks. Barry, the reporter, turned the other way, embarrassed.

Jessie's face was changing again though, wider now, her skin stretching as unseen hands tried to pull it into shape. The creases smoothed out by an invisible iron and a young woman's voice could be heard, coarse and pleading.

'I never did it, e's my baby an' you ain't 'avin' 'im. Don't 'it me ya bastard.' Then a scream curdled at the back of her throat as though it was dragged right out of her.

'Don't mum. Ahh!' A young girl now, maybe six or seven, panic in her voice. 'No. Dad no. You're hurting me. I want to see mummy. Honest to God. Please...' There was a sound of choking and a calm came over Jessie's face again.

The ectoplasm flowing around her was thick now and she began to lift out of the chair, her body bloating out as though full of air. She began to spin slowly, her white eyes bloodshot, her fingers twitching madly in an epileptic dance.

'Fry me you fuckers. I'm not afraid to die.' A rasping male voice coughed out from the depths of her chest. She began to shake visibly now, her whole body flopping like an enormous puppet. Two men in dark suits had run on stage from the wings and were trying to grasp her legs, swollen like barrage balloons, and pull her back to earth.

'Help me!' It was Jessie's own voice this time, quiet and suffocated, somehow finding a voice from deep inside. The body fell to the floor like a lead weight and the men tried to revive her, slapping and shaking her limp body. Someone drew the curtains but they fell behind Jessie's body, leaving her in full view of the shocked audience.

Her breast seemed to contort as a hand-like shape stretched the skin up

from inside, fighting for the surface. 'Help me, please.' Jessie's voice again, a tiny, fractured voice that seemed to sound internally, inside Richard's mind. The skin on her body rippled with waves of tiny limbs, all desperate to grasp the outside world.

'No. No. Mummy! Mummy!' Another child's voice, then 'Take the money, just don't shoot.' More voices, hundreds, thousands, bubbling up to the surface for a sentence or two then lost in the hubbub of a crowd all fighting for a say, all trying to tell their story.

The two men stood back now, staring at Jessie's body in disbelief as voice after voice took her as their mouthpiece, her own cry of help getting fainter and more submerged with each call. The voices were becoming louder, changing sex, accent, language, as though her body had become a radio, her voicebox scanning rapidly through the frequencies of the dead.

Inside her own soul, she fought against the invasion, struggling, suffocating as the dead all rushed and pushed against her, all desperate to have their say, to use this outlet to warn the world of what death is.

Without warning, Jessie's body sat bolt upright, stiff and lifeless, her white eyes barely moving in their sockets. Calm descended as all the voices were hushed. A multitude of whispers echoed through the hall, like insects screeching inside every brain. Richard felt the tape recorder slip off his leg and crash onto the floor. He didn't move, he could only stare.

Even the whispers quietened and Jessie's mouth fell open, a slight trickle of blood running out to bathe her chin. Then the voice came, loud and clear, a deep, male voice, though slipping into a higher octave as excitement overcame it. 'This is the Wolfman. We have taken this body for our own. Too long we have waited in the dark, in the cold, voiceless and impotent. You are wasting your lives. We, the dead, all have tales to tell, of violence, of love, of despair. Now we have a mouth, all you have to do is listen, and understand. All you have to do is record our last will and testament.

'Are you afraid? Fear is only another form of awareness and awareness is only a form of life. Total fear means total awareness. Once you give into fear totally, it ceases to exist, all that's left is awareness. All that's left is life. Do you even realize what a gift that is?

'They've been selling you a phony fake picture of reality all your life. You live in a hell because you don't know anything else but lies, deceit and bullshit, and you don't have the brains of an insect. Well you've had your chance, and blown it. We have a voice, soon a body, and then... You'll know what life and death is all about.'



JOHN GREEN is 27-years-old and has been writing fiction since he was seven. This is his first published story. His hobbies involve composing music and the study of tarot and magic. He is presently writing a fantasy novel on what really happens to those who commit suicide.

ANNI-MATOR

By Sara
Gwenllian Jones

When the full moon was high in the sky she climbed out of the window and into the shadow-drenched boughs of the apple tree. Below her the garden lay silver-frosted and fringed with ragged darkness. The sundial reversed time according to the moon's dictate, and beyond it a marble statue of Mercury froze mid-stride.

She edged her way along the branch until her bare legs brushed against the trunk of the tree. Reaching out and down across a chasm of darkness, her hand found a second branch. She dropped, swung, kicked her legs until her feet found a lower branch. Strung out between these two tangible limbs of shadow, she balanced herself and let the lower branch take her weight. Crouching, she placed her hands beside her feet, gripped, and tilted backwards into the darkness. The rough bark tore her fingers. Moment slurred into moment. She hung there, swaying back and forth across the deptheless night. Then her hands opened and she dropped noiselessly to the ground.

She ran into the waiting night and the silvered darkness embraced her. Dew soaked her bare feet. The chill breeze caressed her skin, touched her with an electric touch, sighed against her cheek. She began to dance for the moon, her white gown ghosting every moment with a flowing ballet of its own. She danced and the moon watched.

And a shadow watched. A single shadow, detaching itself from the gloom, drifting out into the moon-bathed gar-

den. Watching.

She saw it move at the very edge of her vision, saw it gather more shadow to it, swelling, taking on definition. She sensed its malevolence and ran.

The shadow followed.

At the bottom of the garden a stream wound its way between weed-choked banks. The water was very black, sluggish and thick. Like the blood of a dragon, she thought, as she ran across the footbridge. There was a road on the other side, and houses. Windows dark, doors bolted.

She ran down the road and behind her the shadow flew. She ran until her lungs ached and her blood screamed in her ears. Then she stopped running and turned.

The shadow waited.

Night touched her skin, folded around her, rubbed its soft mouth against her throat. Darkness pressed against her eyeballs, blinding her, forced itself into her mouth and nostrils. She felt its suffocating weight fill her throat, expand into her chest. She clawed at the night, but her hands passed through it and her fingernails tore at her own flesh. She opened her mouth to scream but no sound would come. Soon there was only blackness.

And the shadow, watching.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

The alarm clock jarred Mackenzie awake in that grey hour before dawn. He slammed his fist down on the metal button to shut the sound off and levered himself up onto his elbows. Something soft and heavy lay across his chest. His

eyes opened very wide and he looked down, growling, 'Get lost, Yuk.'

The tortoiseshell cat half-opened yellow eyes and eased himself to the floor with insolent slowness.

Mackenzie stood up. The room was bitterly cold and the chill raised goosebumps on his skin. He shivered as he pulled his tracksuit on. In the kitchen, he washed down a handful of vitamin pills with orange juice. Then, preliminary rituals over, he slipped on his well-worn training shoes and swung his arms a few times to get his heart pumping.

His forty-year-old heart, almost worn out by a lifetime of heavy drinking, smoking, and junk-food. The traditional lifestyle of a burned-out hack had consoled his battered ego but done little for his body. Ever since the doctor had warned him, six months ago, that he was taking a short-cut to the grave, Mackenzie had followed a rigid health programme that would never seem less than alien to him. He had always hated health obsessions, despised the fanatics of that new religion, detested all food that was not high in cholesterol or monosodium glutamate. But his fear of death was greater than his capacity for loathing, and the fear won. He became one of the devout.

'She began to dance for the moon, her white gown ghosting every moment with a flowing ballet of its own'

He jogged for one hour every morning, whatever the weather. And every morning he mourned for his warm bed, for black coffee, for the strong Turkish cigarettes he had once relished. He pounded his cravings out of his system along the empty roads, dreaming of an old age when vices could be indulged without concern.

It was a fine morning. The sun had not yet inched itself over the horizon, but already the distant clouds were touched with pale golds and pinks. Mackenzie ran at a steady pace, keeping his eyes fixed on the point where the road met the sky.

He almost didn't see the girl. As he passed her, the wind whipped her gown and the movement caught Mackenzie's eye. He crossed the road to investigate.

She was lying face-down on the roadside, half hidden in the long grass. Her hair and gown were damp with dew, and her skin was bluish. Dead, Mackenzie thought. Murdered.

A coldness gripped him, then a kind of elation that sickened him even as it came. Never in his life had a good story landed, so to speak, at his feet. He had no nose for a story, no instinct for his work. That was why, at forty years of age, he was working for a local rag instead of *The Independent*. Council meetings and charity events, that was his lot. Never anything good. Never a murder.

Until now.

He was not sure of the procedure. Or rather, he was sure but preferred not to admit it. He knew he should not touch the body, that he should go and call the police immediately. But this was it — his big story, his big break. If he called the police straight away he might not learn anything about the girl's death until the case was made public. In which case, every hack in the country would know as much as he did.

He wanted an exclusive. A headline in big letters with lots of exclamation marks. His name on a front page.

Mackenzie crouched down and placed his hand on the girl's shoulder. It was cold. Horribly cold. He gritted his teeth and turned her over.

Eyes that were pools of liquid black stared sightlessly up at him. Black filth spewed from her nostrils and mouth, congealed in a foul puddle around her head. And the stench...

Mackenzie's stomach heaved. He hurled himself away from the corpse and retched. He vomited until his body was too weak to carry on. Shuddering, he stood up and staggered on up the road without looking back.

He waited at the telephone box until the police car arrived, then rode back with them to where the body lay. He knew both policemen, and they laughed at his paleness with the unconcern of professionals. He stayed in the car while they examined the body.

'Black liquid?' Sergeant Appleby said when he came back. 'You said something about black liquid?'

Mackenzie nodded. He was still trembling and his stomach felt bruised. 'I turned her over, and all this stuff came out of her nose and mouth. Like thin black oil, but it smelled terrible.'

The policemen frowned. 'Nothing there now. She's as clean as a whistle. No visible injuries, just dead.'

'Nothing? No blood, even?'

'Not a trace. Like I said, she's clean. Sorry, Mackenzie. Must have been a shock reaction, seeing that stuff. It happens.'

'Then... how did she die?'

Appleby had one of those seen-it-all-before faces. Callous, though not cruel. Came with the job, no doubt. He shrugged, unconcerned. 'Pretty girl, but I don't think she was raped. And she wasn't stabbed, shot, strangled or beaten to death. That's all I know. An autopsy will tell the rest of the story. Probably just natural causes. Sorry, mate, I don't think we have a nice, juicy murder for you.'

Mackenzie ignored the jibe. 'She's only a child. Not more than fifteen-year-old. What natural causes could kill her?'

Again Appleby shrugged. 'Perhaps she had a heart defect or something. Time will tell.'

At the police station, Mackenzie made a statement and promised not to leave town until the enquiry was over. 'Just in case,' Appleby said. A policeman had recognized the girl. By the time Mackenzie left, he had a name and a character profile of the dead girl, courtesy of a talkative duty sergeant who did not know he was a reporter.

Melissa Courtney, aged fifteen. A crazy kid who'd been in and out of institutions since she was six. The police had

a file on her. Once she'd claimed that a tree was chasing her; she stabbed it more than fifty times with a carving knife. Another time, she decided that a shop doorway was some kind of vortex trying to suck her into its depths. She'd set fire to the shop and burned half the street down. Wealthy parents, nice car, nice house, nice part of town. Crazy kid.

There was a story in it somewhere. Forgetting his horror, Mackenzie whistled to himself all the way home.

A week later, Appleby telephoned Mackenzie to tell him that the girl had definitely died of natural causes. The autopsy revealed physical reaction similar to those resulting from drowning, but there was no trace of fluid in the girl's lungs. A freak, fatal reaction — bizarre, mysterious even, but not suspicious. There was absolutely no suggestion of foul play, no evidence to suggest that a second party was involved in the girl's death. Natural causes. Case closed.

Frowning, Mackenzie replaced the telephone receiver in its cradle. He knew what he had seen, and he knew that it had been real. Melissa Courtney had drowned, he was sure of it. Drowned in a foul black liquid that had vanished soon after. A very clever murder, one that left no clues.

He went into the attic and searched through stacks of crates and boxes until he found his old shortwave radio set. Ham radio — one of his many short-lived enthusiasms. The set had been in storage for over ten years, but it still worked perfectly when he wired it up. He played with the tuner until he found the forbidden frequency used by the local police. Then he sat back and listened.

Another week passed before he heard what he was waiting for. Another body, a man this time, dead in strange circumstances. With the accelerator pedal pushed flat in his ancient Volvo, Mackenzie arrived at the riverside location only minutes behind the police.

A small crowd of thrill-seeking onlookers had gathered, and Mackenzie joined them. The dead man lay only a few yards away. He was naked, his skin mottled and grey from head to toe. His arms and legs were bent at knee and elbow as if, while running, he had turned to stone mid-stride and toppled to the ground. He looked brittle. His eyes were as dry as pebbles, his face stretched in a silent, rigid scream.

No blood. No cuts or bruises. No visible sign of injury.

More bizarre natural circumstances, or poison, perhaps. Mackenzie spent long hours in the public library, studying death in general and poisons in particular. No poison he read of could simulate drowning or petrify a running man.

He was only onto something. But he didn't know what. His story on Melissa's death only made page 10 of the local newspaper, and carried no spectacular headlines. 'Mysterious' was the most sensational word that his conservative editor would allow.

The radio began to dominate Mackenzie's life. He became obsessed with its coded messages and spent whole nights hunched over with it with the headset on.

There were more bizarre deaths every week, occurring with increasing frequency. A well-known local wino jumped

backwards through a shop window and the curious angle of impact caused his body to rip open right down the middle. An elderly woman was found skewered on the branch of a tree outside her home; it was assumed that she had fallen while attempting to rescue one of her many cats. A twelve-year-old boy was discovered wrapped in the twisted wreck of his bicycle, crushed to death — a hit-and-run accident, the police said.

'Once she'd claimed that a tree was chasing her; she stabbed it more than fifty times with a carving knife'

Mackenzie was not convinced. In the long, lonely hours of the night he began smoking again, and then drinking heavily. His insomnia returned and exhaustion played tricks with his mind. He saw things that were not there. Shadows that moved at the very edge of his vision, a pale face glimpsed in the mirror, a face that melted to nothing when he focused his eyes upon it.

Soon there was a death occurring almost every third night. The crackled messages from his radio hissed in Mackenzie's ears whenever he managed to fall asleep. His dreams were full of grey flesh, of twisted, frozen bodies. He blotted them out with drink, wrote his unsensational page 10 stories, got through three packs of cigarettes a day. His cat, Yuk, abandoned him in favour of a neighbour.

Three months passed, and forty-six deaths.

A day spent reporting on a local church fête was like a holiday to him, a brief respite from the darkness.

One morning, sober for a change, Mackenzie caught sight of his reflection in a mirror. His face was pale and puffy, unshaven, and his red-rimmed eyes had dark purplish shadows under them. 'He looked worse than he ever had, looked like death itself. 'One more', he told himself. 'One more death, and if the story doesn't open up I'll leave it alone.'

The radio hissed and crackled. A man's body, found in the park. It was 3am. Mackenzie was exhausted, but this one was the last he would follow. The very last. Then it would be over and done with. He could forget about it, sleep again, stop smoking and drinking, start his health programme anew.

He drove very fast, arriving at the park before the police got there. It was dark and there was no one in sight. Mackenzie took a flashlight from the boot of the car, clambered over iron railings, and walked out of the shadow onto an expanse of moon-bleached grass. His flashlight swept across empty darkness.

No sign of anyone. Who had called the police? And why hadn't they arrived yet? He could hear nothing but the dull roar of distant cars.

And a cold voice in his ear, whispering his name. Cold breath on his cheek.

He jumped, span round, and turned the flashlight onto the place where the voice had come from. The bright beam was cut short by a featureless clot of shadow. Mackenzie's heart leapt and raced. 'Who's there?'

'Don't you recognize your own story?' whispered the icy voice, close by; too close for comfort. 'You could call me the Animator. Newspapers like to name killers, don't they? The Ripper, the Fox, the Animator. I'm better than most murderers, though. I have a gimmick. I make inanimate things come alive. Shadows bite, trees move, stones melt and suck. There's your story, Mackenzie. Now run. Run for your life.'

Mackenzie needed no further prompting. He ran, racing across the grass towards the silhouetted architecture of the playground. No footsteps sounded behind him. Panic choked his breath in his throat; he stopped running and looked back. The park was empty. Nothing stirred in the moonlight.

'An elderly woman was found skewered on the branch of a tree outside her home'

Mackenzie shook his head and laughed at himself. Hallucinations. He'd seen too much death lately, too much horror. Too much drink as well, and too little sleep. He'd heard that insomniacs often began to dream while still awake, and he knew the legendary deceptions of drunkenness. He must have dreamed the radio message, dreamed the shadow and the cold voice.

When his racing heart had slowed and steadied, he began to walk back across the playground.

His feet slid over the tarmac, slipped into it. He sank up to his ankles and the ground shifted and sucked as he wrenched his feet up. His next step plunged him in up to his knees. The thick liquid dragged at his legs and his mouth opened in terror as he waded through the fluid playground.

Waist-deep in the stuff, he began to scream - a thin, sobbing sound. Legs cold and numb, pushing against the slow, impossible weight of liquid. Some last vestige of solidity dissolved beneath his feet and dragged him down, lapping against his shoulders, a sluggish whirlpool about his neck. Mackenzie struggled, fought to keep his head above the surface.

He inhaled deeply as the slow-moving liquid slopped against his mouth. Held his breath as its weight pressed against his eyes. Held it until his chest seemed about to burst. Then his mouth opened and his lungs dragged liquid as hard as gravel down his throat.

Sergeant Appleby stared down at the body, at the rigid limbs, the wide, terrified eyes, the mouth pulled back into a snarl. 'Poor bastard,' he muttered. 'Always did drink too much.'

FICTION FILE 42

ROBERT ANTON WILSON



James Wallis checks that his watch hasn't melted into the landscape and talks to Robert Anton Wilson, an author apparently bent on resurrecting the Surrealist Manifesto.

Robert Anton Wilson has the reputation for being completely mad. This reputation is ill-founded and has less to do with him than his devotees, who are split roughly between ardent adherents and dangerous paranoids. On the other hand, his books are far from orthodox. Someone who can write fiction about quantum physics (the Schrödinger's Cat trilogy, published by Dell) and fact about virtual realities, nanotechnology, parallel universes and brain expansion (*Quantum Psychology*, his latest book from Falcon Press) is not an average writer.

'I can't write a formula book. I tried once. I set out to write an ordinary detective story, and my imagination ran away with me and out came *Masks Of The Illuminati*, which is a detective novel but hardly an ordinary one.'

'I think I'm a continuation of the surrealist tradition. The motto of the surrealists was 'Total transformation of mind and all that resembles it', and that's very much the spirit of my books. Visitors to the first surrealist show found a car in the garden where it was raining inside the car and not outside it. They went on and came to a sign by Andre Breton that said 'Dada; watch your overcoat'.'

'At that point, those people were in an alternative reality. I think it's too late for art in the old sense, we need magic. The surrealists were masters of putting the magic back into art, which is what I'm trying to do.'

Much of Wilson's reputation rests on his infamous *Illuminatus!* trilogy written with Robert Shea, influenced by William

Burroughs and Thomas Pynchon and published in the mid 1970s. The trilogy is a hallucinogenic and free-wheeling trip through the ultimate conspiracy theory with guest appearances by Yog-Sothoth and at least one goddess. The books gave him a cult following that persists today.

'There are times when I think, Gee, I've got charisma. Audiences like me. I could make up something like L Ron Hubbard and then I'd be worth about three billion dollars pretty soon. I'll start pretending I'm serious and I'll look for the believers in the audience and I'll have agents follow them out and get them signed up. I don't know why more science fiction writers haven't been corrupted by Hubbard's example.'

Wilson has gone in the opposite direction to Hubbard. His recent books have concentrated on helping people break out of their 'reality tunnels' and to stop following spiritual leaders. Although his declared intention is to alter the mind of the late 20th century 'and the 21st', he backs away from the people who use his name or ideas to do stupid or illegal acts.

'I think it's the writer's responsibility to communicate as clearly as possible. This may be rather hard if you're dealing with a complex subject, your clarity may require some work on the part of the reader. But you are not responsible for every nut who gets hold of your pages, because there is no defence against it, you can't prevent it. How many nuts have been inspired by the Bible?'

'At my most ambitious I want to make as big a revolution as Voltaire or Marx or Nietzsche, only I hope mine will be totally wholesome. On a more modest level I just hope I give some people some good laughs, cheer them up and make them a little more optimistic because the world is suffering from terrible depression.'

Wilson may be the person to cure that depression; he's certainly one of the few who are trying. Even if he doesn't succeed, his bid at opening the human mind to its own possibilities, whether fact or fiction, make fascinating reading.

MOTHERSHIP

By Ned Barrett

Staring at the far horizon, MacAlister saw — silhouetted against the setting moon — what looked like the whole Jap fleet rounding Savo Island. Their guns were raised, like giant claws raking the sky. Poised to fire. Poised to destroy him — Sean MacAlister — the only person left to oppose them. Every other man on board this floating steel fortress was unaccountably out of action — asleep, or worse...

Alone, MacAlister faced the onrushing fleet. Standing in terrible isolation on the cold steel bridge of the mighty battleship Ohio, he faced the enemy. Alone, he faced death. But strangely, MacAlister wasn't afraid. Though he knew he should be. In his mind, he wasn't alone. Not really.

'She' was with him. For now, that seemed enough...

Suddenly, the horizon erupted in bright orange flame. The entire Japanese fleet fired as one. Their only target, the Ohio, MacAlister. The awful waiting was over, the final battle was joined. MacAlister wondered how long it would last.

'Not long...'
Sean MacAlister always had a literal turn of mind. One of those kind of minds that just has to know the answer — no matter how trivial.

Like, if New Zealanders called the letter a 'Zed' instead of a 'Zea', why wasn't their island called New Zedland? He'd spent four hours one night in some off-limits Aussie pub in Sydney, sipping warm beer and trying to convince a crowd of ANZACS — tough desert fighters just back from the North African front — that they'd got their country named all wrong. With a little help from their potent Aussie brew — Foster's they called it, and 24 proof, too — he'd nearly done it.

But right now, sailing towards his first battle, MacAlister was obsessed with knowing why sailors called ships she. She was a sailor — not by profession,

but at least for the duration — and the answer was suddenly very important. At sea, in the middle of the hottest war zone in the Pacific, six thousand miles from his bride, that seemed like the most important question in the universe. At least to MacAlister.

The rolling sea beckoned, called to him, but he ignored its siren song. 'Why,' he asked the sea, 'is this ship called a she? What's ladylike about 45,000 tons of steel, the biggest guns in the fleet and and armour enough to stop a two-ton shell? What's feminine about this damned behemoth battleship Ohio?'

The sea didn't answer, but later, Carson did. Or tried. 'Cause you gotta treat her real nice, like a lady, Lieutenant,' Chief Bo'sn's Mate Albert 'Big Al' Carson had said, staring off into the crystal-blue Coral sea.

His answer was soft-spoken and direct, but his weather-beaten face said something far different: 'Hasn't this blasted ninety-day wonder got anything better...?'

Big Al continued to stare off the fantail, hoping MacAlister would go and do whatever off-duty officers were supposed to do. 'Yeah, Mr MacAlister,' he muttered, 'cause you gotta treat her like a lady.'

But Carson's wasn't the right answer, MacAlister was sure of that. Too easy, too vague — so he headed for the Bridge. The seat of authority, and maybe answers. Instead, he found young Ensign Parker in charge.

'These monsters can be a real bitch to steer, see...' Parker said authoritatively. Greener than spring grass and straight out of the massive officer-factory at Great Lakes, Parker answered like a tough sailor.

He'll be more effective at that act when he learns to shave,' MacAlister thought, dismissing Parker. And his answer.

But proud that he was pulling Officer of the Deck duty — under the watchful eye of Commander O'Shaughnessy, the Ohio's battle-hardened Exec — Parker ran his hand lovingly over the grey steel bulkhead. 'Yeah, she's a real bitch...'

Parker wasn't right, either. MacAlister was sure. There was another word, not bitch. Almost like a voice in his head — nearly loud enough to hear — 'mother...' That sounded right on tar-

get, and MacAlister spun around to see who'd said it. He was alone.

Back on deck, MacAlister looked over the rail at the surrounding sea. Like a mother hen, the Ohio was shepherding sea. Like a mother hen, the Ohio was shepherding a rag-tag fleet of thin-skinned transports. Riding shotgun for a convoy of rustbuckets from a hundred sea-rotted ports and shiny new Liberty ships straight from the Kaiser's assembly lines. These ships, vulnerable and frail, carried the lifeblood of supplies and ammunition, c-rations and av-gas, that would keep the Marines alive and fighting for another week on that Pacific island hellhole, Guadalcanal.

Lieutenant Sean MacAlister put his question about ships aside. For now. And thought about the war. Time to go to work.

'The Japs'd love to blow these babies out of the water,' he mused, watching the convoy. 'Better keep a weather eye out...'

Somewhere, in the back of his brain, he wondered what a 'weather eye' was. Later, he told himself...

Engineering officers might swear that ships ran on fuel oil, but MacAlister knew differently. In addition to his combat post as Gunnery Officer in A-turret, he was ship's Commissary Officer. Quartermaster. Supply Officer. He knew what the ship ran on. Coffee. Coffee enough to float a battleship. And coffee was his responsibility, here on the Ohio.

Which MacAlister thought was kind of strange, since he didn't drink coffee.

'I must be the only man on board who doesn't,' he'd confided to Doc Carpenter. In the wardrobe, one lazy afternoon before they'd gotten to the war zone. Before Australia.

'Mac my boy, you may be right,' Carpenter said. A World War I retreat guard, like most doctors, had been drafted again right after Pearl Harbor, Doc called everybody on ship 'my boy'. Some thought it was because he was too old to remember names. But not MacAlister. Needing to know, he'd asked.

'My boy,' Doc answered him patiently, 'I'm old enough to be your father. Show me a man here more'n half my age, and I'll salute him. Otherwise, 'boy will have to do.'

'OK, Doc. But why do they call this the wardrobe? And why are ships called she?'

Doc sighed. He could see that being MacAlister's shipmate could be tiring... but it was a long voyage, no one was sick, and he had nothing else to do. At least MacAlister didn't treat him like some petrified fossil.

'Son, in the first war, I was Pharmacist's Mate on the old Aaron Ward — you know, one of those four-stack destroyers out in the North Atlantic — hunting U-boats. I was young and green. Hell, I wasn't even a doctor, not then, and figured the wardrobe had something to do with her name. You know, 'Ward's Room'. I wasn't an officer then, couldn't even go in the place. I never thought about it much, just never asked.'

Dead end. Dismissing wardrobe for his real target, MacAlister pounced.

'Doc, you just called Aaron Ward a she. A ship named after a man — how come that's a she? Why is any ship —



why is every ship — a she?"

Doc grinned at his young companion's intensity. "Mac, you ask the most damn-foul questions. First, not all ships are she."

"They're not? But you said..."

"Oh, they are in our Navy. But in Russia, the ships there, they're called he."

"Russia? How do you know?"

"Right after the last war, I was part of the expeditionary forces that sailed to Archangel, the Arctic Sea Port half-way to the damned North Pole, to support the Whites against the Bolsheviks — but don't distract me. For us, and for everybody but the ass-backward Russkies, it's she. And that's a different story."

"Best I can figure," he continued, pulling on his long-dead briar pipe, "we call the ship she because, when we're at sea, we're all alone — never more so. There may be two thousand sailors around you, here on the Ohio, but when the chips are down, you're all alone. Just you and the ship and the sea. See?"

MacAlister didn't, not then. Like many, he began to wonder if Doc wasn't a bit too old for this war. He'd never been more wrong.

No fleet was better supplied than the US Navy, not even in 1942 when it was still digging out from the disaster at Pearl Harbor. But not all the supplies came from the States. Some were bought locally — and that was MacAlister's job.

"Some job," he muttered, walking the docks of Sydney. Looking for the myriad supplies needed to stock that damned steel city.

Back in 38, MacAlister'd figured war was coming. Joined the fleet, right out of college. Confident that his football scholarship build would get him assigned as a fighter pilot, or at least a PT boat-skipper. Something aggressive and maybe just a little bit fun. But some Navy personnel genius noticed his Ohio State business degree and put him in supply.

"A glorified shop-keeper. That's all I am." An old song, and not a happy one. But like it or not, MacAlister did his job well, all the while hoping his transfer'd come through.

Most supplies were easy to come by. Australia, still mostly agricultural, made sure the Navy — there to save the island nation from invasion — had first choice of the best. At fair prices, too. That made Mac's job a cinch. But coffee — that didn't grow in Australia. And as he knew only too well, the ship ran on coffee, strong and black as fuel oil.

So he was more than a little surprised when the stocky, balding Dutchman sought him out, there on the docks.

"Come," the man said without introduction. "Come have a drink with me, and we will talk of coffee. All you need, coffee, I got."

Over a Fosters in the waterfront pub, out of the heat but surrounded by scruffy-looking tattooed sailors from a dozen nations, MacAlister sized up his new friend. Middle-aged, a bit too heavy — burghmaster-style — and overdressed for the waterfront. The Dutchman looked nervous, and a bit sad.

Before he could even ask, the story came tumbling out. The Dutchman, DeKoors, needed to talk. "I was at Balikpapan, on Borneo — on bus-i-ness," he said, struggling with the English,

"when the damned Nazis stole my homeland. My sister, my father — all in Rotterdam. Two years, no word..."

"Then," he said intensely, leaning forward over his beer, "I was here, in Sydney — again with the bus-i-ness — when the damned Japs destroyed my new home, in Java. My wife, my children — almost a year now, and still no word..." He paused, choked with emotion. "I try, through the Swiss Embassy, to get word. The Japs they talk, but they don't say nothing. Not one damned thing."

"So I stay here, until you in the Navy give me my home, and my family back to me. And while I wait, I give you in the Navy my Java coffee. Best price."

"Coffee? You have coffee? Real Java beans?" MacAlister asked, stunned. He couldn't find Java, even at Pearl. What a coup! The captain'd give him a medal for that.

"Ja. Coffee I got. I got all the coffee you want."

Not wishing to look too closely at this particular gift horse, MacAlister agreed on quantity and price, right there on the spot. DeKoors said his coffee was stored at a dockside warehouse, so delivery would be no problem — MacAlister could handle that with a work gang from the ship.

Later, as he and DeKoors were watching the sacks of rich dark Javan coffee beans being carried to the ship, DeKoors nervously led MacAlister to a small room off the main warehouse.

"Herr Lieutenant, this is special," DeKoors said. To MacAlister he looked shaky, troubled.

"My own beans, from my own plantation on Java," he said, gesturing at the distinctive red burlap bags, bulging with beans. "I want you to have these, no charge. My gift to your brave Navy. Just one thing I ask..."

"What's that?" MacAlister asked, unconsciously suspicious.

"Please, save this for your first battle. When you go to fight the Japs, drink my own Java — I do this for my daughter, for Jana..."

"Please," DeKoors said with sudden intensity, his face mottling an ugly red, the colour of the burlap coffee bags, "say you will do this thing for DeKoors, and for Jana."

"Of course I'll do it," MacAlister said, signalling the petty officer in charge of the work crew. He saw no way of turning down the offer without offending his new fairy godfather. But he felt strangely troubled by this generosity. Maybe, he thought, it was the intensity of DeKoors' feelings. Orphaned at four, MacAlister had always been uncomfortable around strong feelings.

"Yes, Mr DeKoors," he assured the Dutchman, "I'll see to it that we save these beans, brew them right before the battle."

DeKoors seemed, not pleased, but relieved, MacAlister thought.

The ship was darkened. With the convoy left behind in Iron Bottom Sound, just offshore from Guadalcanal's Henderson Field, hooded running lights were no longer needed. Over the loudspeaker, Captain Rostenkowski called all hands to attention.

"Men, the first part of our mission — the easy part — is over. The ships in our care are here safely and have already

begun unloading. Men are dying on those beaches — if they're going to have a chance, they need what those ships are carrying. That's were the tough part of our mission comes in."

"Coastwatchers report a Tokyo Express — a damned big Jap fleet — is steaming down the Slot towards us."

"They'll most likely be here sometime just after moonset. That means pitch dark night. And we know the Japs are good at night fighting — you've all heard what they did to Washington and South Dakota. Two weeks ago, those two were the biggest battleships we had afloat in the Pacific. Now we're the biggest — in fact, we're the only — battleship in the Pacific. And it's up to us to derail that Tokyo Express. Alone."

'Standing in terrible isolation on the cold steel bridge of the mighty battleship Ohio, he faced the enemy. Alone, he faced death'

"I won't kid you. Tomorrow, if Henderson Field is still intact, the whole air force'll be breathing down the Japs' necks. That's tomorrow. Tonight, we're on our own. The destroyers and cruisers have to stay back with the transports, to cover against sub and air attacks. That leaves us, and a handful of PTs, to guard the straits. Those little mosquito boats might sting — but remember — it's up to us to stop the Japs. The wolves are on the way. It's our job to keep the wolves out of our henhouse."

"I know every man will do his duty. Battle stations in one hour. Carry on." That was just what MacAlister'd been waiting for. Calling his mess crew together, he broke out DeKoors' special beans. Enough to make coffee for 2,000 scared, thirsty men on the eve of battle.

"Men, these were given to us, special. They're from a Dutch plantation owner from Java. His plantation is now in Jap hands, along with his wife and daughter. The owner gave these to us — gave them — and asked that we drink this coffee on the night of battle. Tell each man what he's getting — and why."

"And tell them to remember, we're not in this alone..." Remembering DeKoors, he hoped this would be enough, enough to offset some of the pain and loss.

Soon, steaming gallons of coffee were being hustled to every corner of the ship. Rich and black, the special-blend Java had a flavour and aroma unlike anything the Ohio's crew had ever tasted. Leaving his men to their work, MacAlister — feeling suddenly useless — headed early toward his battle station: a Turret. Three giant guns, soon to fire in anger for the first time.

"And maybe the last," MacAlister thought, the sour taste of fear in his mouth...

Down in sickbay, Doc Carpenter thought of MacAlister as he gratefully

gulped the strong brew. 'Great stuff. I wonder if Mac broke down and tried this batch,' he wondered as he set up sick bay for surgery. Taking another appreciative sip, he said, 'this could change his whole outlook on coffee.'

Then it was back to work. Combat — sure to be a busy night. He put MacAlister out of his mind, drained his cup and reviewed his preparations.

On the bridge, Captain Rostenkowski drained his oversized ceramic mug and signalled the mate for more. The coffee was good. Different, but good. And that story — like an omen. Scanning the western horizon with the special night-vision binoculars he'd gotten from an Annapolis classmate, a submarine skipper — in trade for ten gallons of fresh ice cream — and a Betty Grable movie — Rostenkowski sipped at the rich, steaming brew.

And prepared for a desperate night battle, alone against a superior foe. Prepared, in his own stoic way, to die...

Undogging the massive armoured-steel door, MacAlister let himself into A Turret. His mess crew'd been here before him, the rich aroma of fresh coffee warred with the metallic smell of machine oil on polished steel and the acrid stink of smokeless cordite gunpowder. Even though the Ohio was not yet at battle stations, the guns should have been manned. And ready. Easy-going for an officer, MacAlister still knew his duty. Grabbing the intercom phone, Mac dialled for the Chief Gunner's Mate for A Turret, 'Gunny' McCoy, ready to kick somebody's tail.

No answer.

So he called out. 'McCoy. Gunny. Are you there? Is anybody there?' MacAlister's voice rang hollowly in the massive turret, echoing like he was in a steel grave.

Puzzled, suddenly on his guard, MacAlister began a careful tour of the turret. Every position was unmanned. Moving further into the turret, he rounded an anti-flash bulkhead. And saw his men, crumpled on the floor, scattered like fallen leaves around the coffee pot. Dropping his battle helmet — it rang like a cathedral bell on the steel deck — he rushed to the men.

Some snored, others barely breathed. Shoving McCoy roughly, MacAlister tried to rouse the Chief. He stirred, but would not — or could not — be awakened.

In mounting horror, he rushed back to the phone. Dialed the Master Gunner in the armoured citadel high above the bridge.

No answer.

Dialed the Bridge.

No answer.

Just for good measure, he dialed Engineering, deep in the bowels of the great ship. No answer.

Duty warred with duty. MacAlister broke out in a sweat. 'I can't abandon my post,' he said aloud, torn, pacing frantically, like a caged beast.

'Maybe it's just my phone...' But he didn't believe it. The evidence was at his feet, something was wrong — terribly wrong. And not just in A Turret.

'I have to let them know A Turret's out of action,' he rationalized, desperate to leave this steel tomb. Desperate to get help, guidance.

'Hell,' he thought. 'I'm only a Lieutenant, and a reserve one at that. Training never prepared me for... this.' He glanced around. 'Whatever the hell this is.'

Pacing, his eyes on the guns again, afraid to look down. 'Guns!' he said, slapping his fist on his open palm. 'We can't fight without guns...' Panic rose, threatening to choke the life from him.

'...be calm...' he heard. Or thought.

'...do not fear. All will be well...' A soothing voice. A voice of peace. Like a voice he'd never heard...

Whirling, MacAlister searched the well-lit turret for that voice. Strangely like a woman's... He was alone.

Bolting for the door, grabbing his battle helmet off the deck, MacAlister raced for the bridge. His heart was pounding like a manic metronome, but his head refused to accept what his gut knew had to be true.

The Ohio's a huge ship, but MacAlister was still in football-trained shape. He'd undugged massive steel doors and climbed steep flights of stairs and reached the bridge in ninety seconds. Flat.

The battle-lit bridge was deserted as a ghost town, glowing in the eerie vision-saving red light of the battle lamps.

Not empty, but, like the turret, unmanned. Men slumbered on the floors by their posts. Some breathed deeply, snoring, others... well, MacAlister wasn't a doctor. Clearly, the Skipper was out, slumped in his command chair. Face mottled a blotchy red that glowed an evil black in the eerie red light.

The Exec was crumpled at the Captain's feet, the remains of a shattered ceramic mug still clutched in one hand. The helmsman and signalman and navigator — all out. Asleep or dead, it made no difference. MacAlister was alone.

'What was it Doc said?' he asked himself. 'Never more alone?'

Panic, like a tidal wave, threatened to drive out reason. Then again, before it could, that voice. Calming, soothing.

'...be at peace, my son. All will be well. Look...' As though a finger was pointing, MacAlister grabbed the Captain's unused night binoculars. He could almost feel a comforting arm across his shoulders as he stared at the far horizon. There, silhouetted against the setting moon, the Tokyo Express rounded Savo Island. Their guns were raised, poised to fire.

Alone, MacAlister faced the onrushing fleet. In terrible, isolation on the cold bridge, he faced the enemy. Alone, but no longer afraid. He knew he should be — but he was beyond fear. And in his mind, he wasn't alone. Not really, she was with him. For now, that seemed enough...

Suddenly, the horizon erupted in bright orange flames. Still out of range, but eager for the kill, the entire Japanese fleet fired as one. Their only target, the Ohio. MacAlister. The awful waiting was over, the final battle was joined. MacAlister wondered how long it would last.

Not long...

Glancing around, he saw the engine Telegraph set for Flank Speed. The gun-laying repeater showed the turrets turning to starboard, tracking the enemy.

'Maybe...' he thought, grabbing the

phone. Dialling A Turret — Gunny McCoy. 'He must be back on post...'

No answer.

The ship's wheel moved silently, bringing the Ohio onto an interception course.

'That's the course I would've ordered if I was in command,' he muttered to no one.

'...I know...'

Not understanding — not willing to understand — but acting on it anyway, MacAlister moved to the stereo rangefinder's read-outs. His targets stood out, clear as day. Just inside maximum range for the Ohio, his targets still fired futilely, racing at maximum speed to close the distance.

'I'd open fire... now!' he barely whispered.

'...yes...'

And the Ohio's mighty guns, biggest in the fleet, roared as one. MacAlister thought each turret should pick out a separate target — risky, but with the ship outnumbered 20-to-1, it made a desperate kind of sense to the young gunnery officer.

'What the hell... I've got nothing to lose,' MacAlister muttered, moving to the targeting scope to spot the shell splashes that would help him gauge the range.

Without warning, nine vivid explosions lit the horizon. Three Japanese heavy cruisers leading the charge — Tanaka, Fubuko and Tonika — found that nothing made by man of mere steel could stand up to the awesome force of six tons of plunging, armour-piercing explosives. As one, the shells dove through the target ships' steel-armoured decks, before detonating in boiler rooms and ammo lockers. They never had a chance.

MacAlister couldn't believe his eyes. As his night vision returned, he checked the hooded radar scope. Green-phosphor traces showed the Japanese battle line stagger, but keep coming.

Almost before MacAlister could think about it, the Ohio's mighty guns thundered again, ripping the fabric of the night. Nine more armoured shells, three more doomed targets.

Not even wondering how the guns' new autoloaders were working without a crew, MacAlister followed the shells' impact — and in the flash of explosions, he saw the shadow of his death. There, hidden behind the now-shattered screen of heavy cruisers were the distinctive pagoda-masts of two Japanese battleships — Haruna and Fuchido. Their guns flashed — they had the range.

Instantly, the Ohio heeled hard a port — the only evasive manoeuvre Mac had ever learned. Quartermasters weren't trained to con ships in combat — he'd never learned how. His simple ruse worked — once. As the deadly hail of Japanese armoured shells — the kind that had sieved the Washington and South Dakota just two weeks ago — splashed down exactly where Ohio'd been moments before, the mighty warrior thundered her wrath once more. This time all focused on Haruna, the lead battleship.

Before those shells could strike, the two enemy battleships belched death once more. Anticipating MacAlister's only evasive move...



'What do I?' he mumbled hopelessly, when he felt the ship heft hard astarboard, right into the teeth of the enemy fleet. A move he'd never thought of, never anticipated.

All of MacAlister's fragile understanding was shaken. 'Hey,' he shouted as the Haruna was ripped apart by the deadly rain of shells, and a wall of water erupted just 50 yards off Ohio's portside. 'I thought I was...'

'... be still. I am here. I'll take care of you...'

'Nothing made by man of mere steel could stand up to the awesome force of six tons of plunging, armour-piercing explosives'

Again, Ohio thundered. Valiantly, hopelessly, Fuchido returned fire before disappearing in a mind-searing explosion. MacAlister didn't know what to do, and couldn't think. But the Ohio jinked again anyway, sliding gracefully from under certain death. The Fuchido's parting shot fell harmlessly astern.

'...how...?' was all Mac could say as he stared helplessly toward the horizon.

The Japanese were fanatically brave — but they'd just lost their eight most powerful ships in as many minutes. They charged on against an enemy still safely out of range of the surviving ships' guns. When the Ohio's guns roared once more, the remaining cruisers and destroyers turned like well-choreographed ballerinas and fled the way they came, back toward Rabaul.

Without a word, without a thought, MacAlister collapsed gracelessly into the embrace of the Exec's battle chair, next to the Captain. The Ohio turned back on course, slowed to cruising speed and trained its mighty guns fore and aft, ready...

'Who are you?' MacAlister asked in a desperate whisper, almost afraid to talk. 'Who are you?'

'... you know me, my son...'

'Mom?' Hope warred with a shattered remnant of logic.

'...yes, my son. I am what you think. And more. But not just your mother, though she is part of me...'

'Then who... what...?'

'... be at peace, my son. I am Ohio — and you are all my children. And while you are with me, you are never alone...'

Doc Carpenter decided that Captain Rostenkowski had the constitution of a horse. Nearly 200 men have been confined to sick bay,' he reported, formally, there in the Skipper's private cabin. The harsh light of a tropical sunrise blasted through the porthole.

'Miraculously, Skipper, none have died — but don't give me the credit for that. Best I can figure, we all should be dead — 'cept MacAlister, of course...'

'And you're the biggest miracle of all,

Rosie,' he thought. Doc had known the Captain — Rosie, back then — as a kid-Ensign on the old Aaron Ward almost a quarter-century before. He could still drink more coffee than any man afloat.

Pushing aside a radiogram to the Sydney Shore Patrol, the one regarding a Dutchman named DeKoor, Rostenkowski regarded his old friend bleakly.

'MacAlister...' the Captain said softly. Thinking.

'What do you make of him, Doc? We both know he bought the poisoned coffee — and was the only man on board who didn't drink it. Hell, if I was a suspicious man...'

'Aren't you forgetting something Rosie?'

The time for formality was over. Carpenter could see the Skipper was troubled — he needed a friend right now.

'Hell,' Doc thought, 'we all do...'

'No, I'm not forgetting. God — I may never forget. MacAlister was the only man conscious on the whole damned ship. One man, alone on the biggest ship in the fleet. A junior — a very junior — officer, one who knows nothing about driving one of these wagons...'

'Yeah. Totally inexperienced. Maybe he wanted to fight the Japs all by himself... sabotaged the whole crew...'

'Dammit, Doc, give me a break. But somebody fought this ship...'

'And if that radio report I glimpsed,' Doc said, gesturing towards his friend's desk, 'is true, that somebody fought the whole Jap fleet to a standstill...'

'Standstill, hell. Coastwatchers say we sank six heavy cruisers and two — two, dammit — battleships, Mitsubi Class, too. Big mothers. Henderson Field confirms the whole story. Had one of those radar-equipped Black Cats overhead during the fight — either the pilot's drunk, or we licked the Tokyo Express single-handed...'

'Yeah, single-handed,' Doc said dryly.

'Dawn strike' on the radio now,' Rostenkowski said, ignoring his friend's sarcasm. 'Says they can't find anything but a handful of light cruisers and a few tin cans — they want to know if they should even bother with the small stuff...'

'Yeah. After what we did, they're hardly worth fooling with. By the way, on the way in, Sparks told me he's decoding some damned thing for you. From Halsey himself, for God's sake. Skipper, like it or not, you're up for a commendation...'

'Doc... a commendation. What'll I tell them? What'll I tell Halsey? What do I tell myself? Good Doc, Doc, what happened out there last night? The Captain suddenly looked bleak, lost and a hundred years old.

'MacAlister...'

'Yeah, MacAlister...'

Always, before, Sean MacAlister had been self-conscious. Shy around displays of emotion. Loathe to be the centre of attention. But on the Bridge, standing beside the Captain and learning to con that battleships — and later, when Admiral Halsey himself pinned on the medal — for the first time in Sean's life, he felt at peace. For the first time in his life, she was there... For now, that was enough.

Rewind... Two men masked in leather man-handle me into the room. One hits me across the face and I fall backwards. My fall is broken by a mound of satin cushions heaped in the centre of the floor. The other man locks and bolts the iron-studded door then hangs the key-ring from his belt. The two men stand with their naked backs pressed against the door, their well-muscled arms folded, staring down at me through the eye-slits of the masks.

The room is illuminated by brilliant moonlight shining through a high window. The window is barred and is, in any case, too high for me to reach, even if the guards had not been there to prevent me. Desperately I look around for some other escape route. There is none.

Then for the first time, I see a fourth person in the room, hiding beneath the gauzy curtains which hang from the ceiling. It is a boy — about eighteen years of age — dressed in short and loose-fitting garments that make him look like some bizarre combination of Roman Emperor and ballet dancer. He comes forward. I look at him, uncertain whether he is my fellow prisoner or another tormentor. He reaches out a hand to touch a graze upon my thigh. I back away from him. But he stoops and kisses my cuts. I look into his eyes. I put out a hand and stroke his head.

And that's when it starts to hurt. No matter how many times I watch it, the pain never gets any less.

So I stop the tape. I can't take any more.

Funny, really. This moment, the one I hate so much, it's this same moment that made the vid such a success. When the boy, Rick, looks up into my eyes and feels — that emotion. For me. Love. For me.

Funny, really.

Not the kind of feelings you get often in a porno sensavid. Lust, disgust, fear, excitement — they're the things you expect. This other one though — that was something new. Something for the jaded palate.

I'm not kidding you when I say the vid would have sunk without a trace if it hadn't been for that one moment. Not that it was a bad vid. Just a bit bland for modern tastes — a bit too classy, arty, subdued lights, clever camera work, but fairly uninventive with the sex.

In other words, pretty much the kind of vid I always do. I've got a very limited repertoire, that's what they tell me. But what I do I do good. If you've seen any of the vids I've starred in you'll know what I mean. Orals are my specialty, I guess. I hardly ever do insertions. Sometimes a bit of self-play. Never anything mondo bizzarro. But the climax is almost always an oral. Both ways. I give and I take. Something to do with my natural sense of fair play, I suppose.

I only got into Sensavid, in the last year or so, after it was decriminalized. Of course, the porn business was using it long before that but I'd always refused to have anything to do with it while it was underground. Too dangerous. Especially having the sensor implanted. There's one part goes into the base of the brain itself — a few cells off target and you can

BLUE NARCISSEUS

Huw Collingbourne

end up a vegetable. I've seen what can happen. I've lost some good friends through bad implants.

There was never any reason to have it banned in the first place. It all got blown out of proportion, that's all. Even today, there's a lot of crap written about Sensavid, believe me. You don't want to swallow all the stuff you read. The stories about people getting slit up just by watching a sensa slasher film, that's a load of bollocks, it really is. I did quite a bit of research before I had my implant, so I know what I'm talking about. The way the thing works is, it records electrical impulses that happen in certain parts of the brain — what they call the pleasure centres — and then when you play back the vid, the sensatrack gets transmitted through the headset and sparks off the same pleasure centres in the viewers as were recorded from the actor.

It was developed for medical use, originally, and there's rumours the military and police have been using it too. If we knew what they did with it, I reckon it'd make sensa porn look like child's play. Which it isn't incidentally, because they can't do the implants on kids, it doesn't work. So that's another wrong thing you may have read in the tabloids.

What is true is that sensa technology makes all the difference to a porno vid. It's a real kick, especially if you've never tried it before. Though, like anything, you start getting used to it after a while.

Which is why everyone's looking for new angles these days. Like all those crummy exploitation and hyperpink vids. God, if you've never felt one of them, let me tell you, you don't want to. It's nothing but revulsion and anger and loneliness. That's why that crap has never been big business. It just depresses you.

The vids I do might not be the last word in weirdness but at least they make you feel good.

Blue Narcissus was our first experiment with a dual sensatrack. That was the new angle we were taking. The whole vid was recorded with one track of me and another one made up of recordings from my partners. There were six guys in all, not counting myself. Rick was the last.

I recognized his face as soon as I saw him on set. But not his body. This was his first skin flick. Actually, it was his first of any kind. He'd been working

with the vid company for a couple of months as the Assistant Key Grip's Assistant Assistant or something. Which meant he was the person who made the tea and cleaned up the mess. He was one of those really quiet types, a bit prim and proper looking. The kind that always goes down a storm in gay vids. But I had no idea he had any interest in participating.

I also didn't know he was going to go straight into the big time. That is to say as big a time as anyone goes into in this industry.

Shit!

I wish I could rewind...

None of it would ever have happened if it hadn't been for that dual track system. That was a really clever idea somebody had. The thing is, the double track makes a vid kind of good value, I guess. I mean, you can watch it twice and feel it from both sides. Or, if there's two of you watching it, you can plug in two headsets and each feel a different track. That opens up some interesting possibilities, when you think about it. So I'm told.

It certainly opens up interesting possibilities for an actor. It's weird enough feeling your own sensatrack on a vid. But feeling the track laid down by a partner — man, that is really weird!

Like, in the first scene of *Blue Narcissus*, I have an encounter in a sauna with a little redhead called Joe. On screen he looks really in command of the situation. But it turns out he's shit-scared of me. God knows why. I never did anything to him. Well, nothing that wasn't in the script, anyway.

Then there is the scene in a Sultan's harem — don't ask me how I got from a sauna to a harem, it's kind of complicated, so if you're really interested you'll just have to see the vid — and anyway, I have this scene with a eunuch, except he isn't a eunuch as any damn fool can see. And I'm meant to 'brutally subjugate him' (that's what the script says), which is just a fancy way of saying I have to make him do what a man's got to do, whether he wants to do it or not, if you get my drift. Except he's laughing to himself, deep down inside he finds this just the funniest thing he's done all year.

Personally, I think that spoils the scene. I complained about it to the director, told him we should re-shoot or at least dub a new sensatrack on it, but he said I had no sense of humour and was just being vain. I thought about that and

I have to admit he could have a point.

But it was that final scene that really slaughtered me. When these two guards shove me into this room, onto this pile of cushions, and I reach down to tousle Rick's hair. And then he glances up into my eyes and suddenly — pow! — it hits me like a punch straight in the guts. Christ, I hate it. Watching that vid with Rick's track selected. I get to that part and I am suddenly feeling like my head is ready to explode, my body is just delicious with... I mean, it's all down to this electrical device strapped onto my head, sparking off some nerve clusters or something in my brain, but shit, it gets me real bad even so.

I tell you in all honesty, until I played back that vid I'd never felt anything like it before in my entire life. For a split second there I am insanely in love. With myself.

The first time I played that track I tore the headset off faster than if it'd been a rattle snake. I felt like I was going to be sick, I really did. I felt like I'd been poisoned.

Rewind...

Play: My track.

Now the same scene from my point of view. The picture's the same, but it means something totally different. I see myself reach down and tousle his hair. He looks up at me and I feel... Nothing. Well, as near as damn it. Just a kind of emotional background noise. You'd be hard put to guess what was going through my mind. I could have been thinking about how long we should spin out the scene or how much I'd get in my pay packet or whether I was going to get a pizza or a burger for my dinner that night.

Rewind...

Play: Rick's track.

Pow! — it hit me again.

You have to take my word for this but feeling someone loving you is not at all the same thing as having them tell you about it. I've had people swear undying love and all that crap plenty of times. I never let it trouble me. It's their problem. But on sensavid it gets you two ways at once. Feeling the emotion itself. And feeling your own part of it. Loving yourself. But doing it secondhand.

I really screwed up that night. I smoked some dope, which is something I hardly ever do, honest to God, and I drank a lot of beer, tried to calm down. But how can you get calm when you've been inside another person's head and felt like that? About yourself.

There was no work about that week so I had plenty of time to get myself sorted out, take time off, read a few books, do some sun bathing, go to a few clubs.

On Saturday night I went to The Cellar — a dingy little late-night disco bar, very popular, not too cruisy. It was a stupid thing to do, really. I mean, I knew he lived in that district, maybe I'd even heard him say he went to the club. I don't remember my reasons now. All I know is it was a stupid thing to do. Especially since, if he went to that club at all, this was the one night in the week when he was almost certain to be there.

And he was.

I saw him come in just before midnight. Wearing faded jeans, too tight, white T-shirt and black leather jacket.



The standard uniform. He looked very young. And very beautiful. I can't think how that hadn't struck me before. His good looks, I mean.

He was with friends. Two boys I'd never come across before – in any sense of the expression. I don't think they were in our business, though they could easily get the work if they wanted it.

I didn't approach them. I just watched. I watched them laughing together, dancing together. Just friends, clearly, not lovers. They were having too much fun to be lovers.

I watched. And I kept my distance. But the more I watched, the more I wanted. It was after 1.00 when I made my move. He was at the bar ordering some drinks. I casually placed myself nearby. He would have to pass me as he left the bar.

He took the drinks and walked by. He hadn't seen me. 'Rick,' I said, as though I'd only just noticed him.

He look around. 'Oh,' he said. 'Hi.'

A fat man in a checked shirt bumped into me, spilled some lager over my jeans, drunkenly apologized. Rick, meanwhile, had moved off.

I found him, a while later, sitting at a table near the stage. At eye level there was some guy minimally dressed as a red Indian doing a lousy strip routine involving feathers. I strolled across to Rick.

'How you doing?' I said casually. 'I was just going to offer you a drink when that fat guy got in the way.'

'It's OK,' Rick said. 'We've got drinks.' 'Aren't you going to introduce me to your friends,' I heard myself say and realized at once what I sounded like. That tired old chat-up line...

I pulled up a chair and joined them, uninvited and feeling it. The atmosphere in the club was hot and sweaty; at this table it was verging on the Arctic. I couldn't figure it out. I'd played that vid so many times, I knew exactly how Rick felt about me. Why was he acting this way now? Playing hard to get maybe? Leading me on?

I smiled at him.

No response.

And then it struck me. Maybe his friends didn't know the business Rick was in. Maybe he told them he had some ordinary job, working in a bank or an insurance company? Maybe he was frightened that I was going to spill the beans. Maybe his friends had seen some of my vids and would recognize me, then start asking Rick some awkward questions.

I stuck my ground anyway. This boy had screwed me up so bad, I couldn't face leaving him now.

Eventually, the stripper finished and the disco music starting up again. I glowered at Rick's friends – in a friendly sort of way you understand, but they got the message anyway. They made some excuse and took to the dance floor.

Good riddance.

This was my chance.

I knew exactly what I had to say.

I had to tell Rick.

All about it.

But it was difficult. He was still acting cold, distant.

'I watched the film,' I said. 'Both tracks.'

That's all he needed to know, I thought. The implications were obvious.

Rick looked at me, very seriously. Without smiling, he simply said: 'So did I.'

Rewind...

Play: My track.

No wonder he was cold with me. I'd been so wrapped up in my own feelings I hadn't even thought how Rick must have felt when he'd played through the vid.

Felt me.

Feeling...

Nothing.

I was going to have to convince him that the situation had altered.

'There was some guy minimally dressed as a red Indian doing a lousy strip routine involving feathers'

Even before it had gone on release the vid company had already decided that Blue Narcissus was destined to be a monster hit and they'd already started planning the sequel. Same formula, same star – me. But this time Rick was taking a leading role too. Not just the quick bit of throwaway flesh he'd been in the first one.

They got it organized all kind of quick, I thought. Like as though the whole thing between me and Rick had been planned from the outset.

Then I realized.

Amazing it had taken me so long to cotton on, really.

That's what they had done. That was their angle all along. Rick wasn't an accident. They must have done some sensa tests on him, found out the way he felt about me and then gave him the part in the vid just for that extra kick.

When I figured this out, I felt angry. I felt the vid company had dealt badly with me.

But the mood passed. Maybe it was all to the good. After all, if it hadn't been for that vid, I'd never have known that Rick, or anyone, could feel like that about me. And I would never have felt about Rick the way I was feeling now.

The new vid was my chance. It would save the bother of explaining to Rick. He'd only have to play back the rushes to feel what I felt.

Rewind...

Play: My track.

Two masked men in leather manhandle him into the room. One hits him across the face and he falls backwards. His fall is broken by a mound of satin cushions heaped in the centre of the floor. The other man locks and bolts the iron-studded door then hangs the key-ring from his belt. The two men stand with their naked backs pressed against the door, their well-muscled arms folded, staring down at him through the eye-slits of the masks.

I emerge from my hiding place beneath the gauzy curtains which hang from the ceiling. I see the marks upon him, the bruises and the cuts. I reach

out to touch him. He backs away from me. I stoop and kiss his cuts. He looks into my eyes. He puts out a hand and strokes my head...

Rewind...

Play: Rick's track.

He reaches out to touch me. I back away from him. He stoops and kisses my cuts. I look into his eyes. I put out a hand and stroke his head.

And feel: nothing.

Rewind...

Play: Rick's track.

Nothing...

Rewind...

Nothing...

I see myself.

Rewind...

Nothing. I see me. I see. Nothing. Feel nothing.

Rewind...

Not even hatred.

Rewind...

And play: Rick's track.

He looks into my eyes. I put out a hand and stroke his head. Suddenly, unexpectedly, wonderfully – I spit into his face. The guards seize him, drag him, struggling like an animal, out of the room. He looks hurt, he yells out like a pig feeling the first cut of the knife at its throat. The door opens. Another boy is brought in. A redheaded boy, younger, prettier. Suddenly feelings come back, that strange, marvellous, dangerous, erotic feeling.

Rewind...

And play: My track.

Spit. Cold.

In my mind.

Recorded.

On tape.

This isn't in the script. Nobody told me about this.

Rewind...

And play. My track.

Rewind...

And play...

Rewind.

It's funny.

When you think about it.

It's been the biggest success ever, that vid. So intense, they say. Lifting sensa-vid to new heights, they say. Erotic. The coldness of the one.

Contrast.

The desperation.

Of the other.

Quite a kick, they say.

A totally new angle.

Something for the jaded palate.

Rewind...

Something.

Rewind...

And nothing.



HUW COLLINGBOURNE is a freelance journalist who mostly writes about computers these days. However, the highlight of his career to date was scripting and co-directing (with rock singer, Zodiac Mindwarp) an SF photo-story for a teenage pop magazine. The magazine was subsequently seized by police after a complaint that the story encouraged cannibalism among readers!

THE HAND THAT FEEDS THAT

By
Kylie Bevan

Okay, so, why a scoutship? I've had it with that question. Squadron, DivCom, Starfleet itself - different lips, same question: frigate, cruiser, even a goddamn battle-cruiser, and you settle for a shit-crate of a three-man scoutship. Why? There's a reason, a good one, good enough to force me here, in this shit-crate, in orbit above the Earth, making up this tape and wondering if, when copies of it finally reach Starfleet and the media, someone will have brain enough to listen. And with what I've witnessed, these past months, someone had better listen, and listen good. In case it happens again.

Hell-shit. You know, now I'm actually here, where in sweet Jesus do I start? Crazy: I had it all mapped out, the whos and whys, the whens and wheres, and now I'm here - gone! Name, let's start with my name, even though the headlines will have been screaming it for a week or more by the time this tape is delivered. I am Willard B Horver - that's right, the same - cruiser captain and commanding officer of the next mercy convoy to Mintaka 4. The date is 343/2085 Standard, the time just 24 hours before departure of that convoy on its mission. And me? I'm here, sure, supposedly pouring over final details and suchlike crap, but in reality standing in front of my viewport, looking down on Earth and wondering, just wondering.

She looks kind of different from up here. She always does. No smog, no crowds, no vidcreens on every corner telling you what part of your body needs

freshening up next. No, none of that shit. More light, a little blue jewel just sitting out there in the cold, floating along minding her own business, and probably wondering what next we're gonna do to her. Strange, that glow. You don't get it from a fistful of the brown stuff you pick up down there on the surface. Yeah, real strange. Anyone can see it, anyone with a seat on an orbiting weather station. Or maybe changing ships at one of the moon's transit stations. Earthrise from the moon - man, that's something else.

Seems I've found that place to start. Well, it had to get put in somewhere along the line. If I look out again and shift lock maybe ninety degrees, I can see something else. It's a ship, a Vega class freighter, the eightieth of her class if the number stenciled above her bridge means anything. Number 80 of what - hundreds? God alone knows. Twenty years on and Newport Space are still turning them out, no basic changes, no custom jobs, a kind of C-130 for the great black deep.

There's someone at work on this one. Anyone looking out with me would see him, this silver doll crawling along the hull, stopping now and then to take in some point of possible coming interest to Ship's Engineering. That's what they'd see. That. No more. But me? I'm different. I'm still looking at him, still seeing the same spacesuit and visor, and round them a glow, not borrowed from the sun or stolen from the Earth, but coming from his body. That's what I said, from his body, piercing his suit and radiating out maybe half a metre. No one else can see it. But I can.

Maybe that's not strictly true. It's not only me. There are others, some you might hear of or read about. But brush their lives with yours? Pretty remote. We're rare. Very rare. Kirlian vision they call it, the ability to see the human aura. And man, is that a whole field of shit. Proof, cry the believers, of psychic energy, of man's spirit, even the very existence of the human soul itself. And

the sceptics yell back body heat or light distortion or any one of a thousand crazy ideas yet to be cooked up by science. It might, they sometimes say with a nudge and a knowing snigger, even be hallucination. Crap. You don't hallucinate down a whole lifetime. I'll tell you this once, here: I may not know what it is but I sure as hell know what it isn't.

Auras. You'll never find two the same. Take illness. Show me someone whose days are numbered and I'll tell you how long he's likely got. Better still, let me at him before he even knows he's ill and I'll tell you what's wrong, start the bells ringing. It never fails. It's like some infallible early warning system. Sticky heart? Dark smudge in the chest. Guts rotting away? Big grey belly below the ribs. Brain tumour starting to bud? Black blossom on the skull. Whatever the problem, it'll show up, deepen in shade, maybe even grow in size until Zap! - the poor sap you're watching begins to feel something is not quite right. By then, it's probably too late.

You can tell a lot of someone's mood, too, just by watching the colours change. Steer clear of anyone wearing red lighting for a hat: he's probably about to blow his stack and is just waiting for the wrong guy to walk by. On the other hand, keep a few kind words by for anyone showing too much purple; could be he's on his way to jump off a bridge somewhere. As a kid, it was a lot like that, where 'you look a little off colour today' meant more than just that.

It wasn't easy. Because I could see this weird glow round people, it seemed kind of natural to assume that others could too. Oh sure, I'd wondered, down the years, things I'd said that would maybe make friends take a step backwards or something, but it was still part of me, something to be used like an arm or a cock, never to be really questioned. Proof, if you could call it that, came one lazy summer's day. Like anything that hits between the eyes, I wasn't looking for it.

We had a visit from a favourite uncle. Famous as well as favourite. If you recall your space history, you'll no doubt couple the name Arnold Horver Jrn. With the ill-fated exploration of the Vulpecula system. Yeah, same guy: the one who commanded the mission, who stumbled across the warrior race on some long-censored world were encouraged to forget about, and who lost two cruisers in the misunderstanding that followed. The planet's blockaded now, but that's not something Starfleet likes to tell people.

So he arrived that day, and I'll tell you something; there are things you can see without wayward vision. Things like sallow skin stretched taut over bent bones; like dark hollows where there used to be bright pools of knowing; like a weathered brow long creased with fighting. You've guessed it: there was more. And for that, you needed my eyes. There was a greyness about him, all around him, dark and ugly, concentrating in black patches around his guts and middle chest.

My father asked him how he was, and that was crazy. Didn't he know? Couldn't he see? Hell, dad, this here's a man with too little time left, and you ask after his health? No, I didn't say that, or anything

else, however much my brain screamed it; I guess maybe tact doesn't figure too highly in the training programme for twelve-year-olds. No, I bided my time, reckoning on something we know as 'later'.

That later came while we were sitting in the garden, on the swing-chain, uncle and boy worshipping, bees buzzing lazily around, my father's pampered roses blazing colour (you'd have seen them as red. I saw more). It was some while before I spoke.

'Bit of a change from space, eh, Army?' Crass, obvious.

'Sure is,' came the reply, heaved out, like a sigh.

'Bet you can't wait to get back up,' I gestured vaguely at the sky, 'up there.'

'A fine thing if I could.' An answer of sorts, saying nothing, telling enough.

'How long before your next mission?' I asked, ignoring, hoping.

He turned to me, eyes still knowing, and said simply: 'There is no next mission.'

He turned back. Man, is silence ever loud.

'Guess I don't need to ask why, huh?' I said.

He smiled wryly. 'Shows, does it?'

I nodded. 'Kinda hard not to notice. Mom and dad didn't say much, though.'

'You think them wrong for not commenting on misfortune?' he said.

'Well... no... I just...' I never finished.

'They're good people, Will,' he said, 'good people. They've known for almost as long as I have. I guess they chose not to tell you. Don't blame them for that. Up until a few months ago, there was still hope.'

Hope. A word, that's all it ever was, all it ever is, all it'll ever be. I sat there, lost, the words slipping out before my brain could catch them.

'Didn't anyone see what was happening to you?'

He shrugged. 'Insidious disease, cancer. Before you know you've got it, it's already there, gnawing away inside you, eating you up.'

'Yeah,' I said, still lost, 'but that's my point. Didn't anyone see that?'

He looked at me again, eyes steady, puzzled. 'What was there to see, Will?'

How do you handle that? How do you handle years of hints — suspicions — half-notions all gelling together in one single stupid moment? No, I didn't press it further: it was the wrong time, and if there's one thing shock teaches you, it's a certain caution. I changed the subject.

Poor Uncle Army. He never lived long enough to learn what I learned; that had he visited more often, I could have sounded the alarm long before any doctor; that my weird sight owes less to anything psychic and more to retina construction; even that it's no more supernatural than someone being colour-blind (look at flight wavelengths — some you see, some you don't). No, he never had the chance to learn all that. He died within the month.

Our friend outside has just disappeared out of sight behind number three pod. Vega 80. There are sixteen of the brood assigned to this mission, all lying off in orbit, each one's Engineering section even now getting chewed out to come to readiness in time. Apart from the pennant number and maybe the odd

home-rigged antenna, you wouldn't tell one from the other — at the nose, a windowed ball housing the bridge, then a cylindrical hull containing stardrive and guidance systems, and strapped round this, anything up to ten detachable cargo pods. Ugly? Sure as hell is. But it works.

You'll have seen them already, of course, stars of the monthly task forces, pods brimming with grain and rice and whatever else can be crammed in and eaten. And all to the one starving planet. Man, do I remember its discovery, the ballyhoo, the banner headlines, the crap proclaiming sentient life discovered; new life in a new world. Con trick. Nothing new. But people like it, pay for it. Gives them something to get orgasmic about in their dull lives, just so long as it's not too heavy (and let's face it, readers of the sooper-dooper sooper-soaraway Sooper-nova always did have trouble with words of more than one syllable).

'There was a greyness about him, all around him, dark and ugly, concentrating in black patches around his guts and middle chest'

But okay, they were sentient. I'll give you that — a bit backward, maybe, but intelligent, and if not exactly civilized then at least above eating exploration missions. And their world? Small, mostly desert and scrubland, able to support no more than maybe a couple of million, and all of them nothing more than dark skin over walking bones. And despite what the vids say, there were crops, but meagre and all the wrong stuff, barely enough to feed even half of them. Looked like an orbiting disaster area. And we'd arrived just in time.

The first vids came back soon after. The outcry you need not need me to tell you, but no doubt helped along by a few well-posed shots of limp-limbed kids lying helpless in the arms of Castor crew members. And there was that famous one, just two hands, one holding the other, Captain Harding and some dark and shrivelled brat that was on his way out for sure. He's still alive and kicking, as we all know, unsuspecting media star, our very own shining example of what can be achieved through interplanetary co-operation and a massive spaceflit. Crap.

No one suspected, did they? Maybe we'd just gotten too caught up in our own goodwill to wonder. Let's face it, where famine stalks, death's just a few steps behind, the oldest and the weakest the first losers, but where were the bodies? Buried? No graveyards. Okay, so no burial ritual in a backward culture, but then no mouldering corpses, either. Burned, maybe. No funeral pyres were ever observed, by the Castor mission or since. Maybe they just ate their dead.

Yeah, great, recycle protein rather than waste it, but you show me any piles of bones scattered round cold cooking fires and I'll stand you in beer for the rest of your days. No, there's material enough on that one to keep the anthropologists guessing for months. And guess they will: someone's yet to crack the language.

So we started our spaceflit, the big one, ships full of food and good intent, and who could miss it? The vids were full of it, pictures everywhere, companies falling over themselves to give it airtime. Remember the one of the kid sitting up in a field-hospital bed? Round eyes staring out of this dark face, lips smiling what we knew had to be undying gratitude? I may be nuts but I remember what someone once said to me about smiling: if you want to gauge a smile, don't look at the mouth, look at the eyes. You know what I did? I got hold of a copy of that picture from the vid company, face on into camera. Then I looked at it and covered the bottom half with one hand. And you know what? The eyes weren't smiling. They reminded me of a spaceline hostess as she goes through her 'Welcome aboard. Thank you for flying Pan-galactic Spaceways' routine. But it's the lips that say all that; the eyes say 'We've landed you, brother, and dry martinis and Chicken Maryland regardless, this is gonna be one bitch of a trip.' Next time you fly Pan Gal, clap your hand over your hostess's mouth, see if you see the same. That's how I felt when I looked at this kid.

But that wasn't the only picture I got back. They sent another. It was that famous shot, the one of the two hands, white and grey, the one holding the other. Two hands. One symbol. World Aid: three days of non-stop Depleted Metal. No, there was nothing in the line-up to appeal to me, either. But someone — seven hundred thousand someone, in fact — paid good credit to get in. Like I say, I didn't go, but I heard the stories, not least the ones about street riders stoned out of their gourds on Smart so as to stay awake for the whole three days. Some achievement: 104 dead, nine insane and one live burial. About par for the course.

I did see part of it, I will admit. I dropped in on a friend just as he was setting up, his video to replay Proton Gutnegg and one of their more infamous smash hits, Bitch Baby, Twist My Joystick. They finished, the audience erupted, and the duty host gushed. No face on the screen, though, and that was kind of pushy. Just this goddamn two-hand picture and his voice-over asking us, pleading with us, imploring us to dig deep into our pockets, folks, and help this dying world and its starving people. And all the while, the totalizer would be clicking up, ever up as those with a conscience keyed in account numbers on their handsets. Feed the galaxy from the comfort of your own armchair. Missionary work without the tears. And don't forget to take the krill-protein pizzas out the microwave during the next commercial break. I left before it reached the 1.5 billion mark. The convoys started soon after.

There was the first, twenty-six ships in all. They were unescorted to those days, just the freighters, no warships



bar the odd single frigate for command and navigation. Vega 56 should have made us think again. Yeah, I know: the press reported it as an accident, and if the Board of Inquiry findings are to be believed then okay it was. But they also said she couldn't have her shields up. I can tell you otherwise, I knew Rube Darby, 56's commander, and I can tell you no way would he have ever done a damn fool thing like enter orbit round an alien planet without all shields in place and working at full click. He was that sort of guy. Strict. Methodical. But it's the same old Starfleet story — no survivors, no published log. How do you argue against that?

The shields were up for sure on 147 and 148, twin members of convoy fire. They had to have been: command directive made sure of it. Yet they were still lost. The vids were full of it, partly for its tragedy value — and brother, did they milk it for all it was worth! — partly to kick into second, third or even fourth place the Crosby scandal (And what about that! Government senator getting his kicks out of carving off and preserving women's nipples! Sure as hell beats stamp collecting). 56, 147, and 148. One maybe shielded. The other two for certain. That was when the warships came in.

I wasn't involved in those first runs. Well, things had gotten a little quieter after the twins went down. One frigate to every four freighters, that was the ratio. No cruisers then. No need. You don't send a ship with that sort of firepower unless you've got something pretty damn positive to shoot at, which we hadn't. No, the first cruiser run was Convoy 12, and all because of 11. You remember 11. We all remember 11. Nearly a third of those ships didn't come back. Seven in all, six freighters and one frigate. The newsmids had a field day. And how!

If you can't erase a stain then gloss it up, that's how the press deals with a failure. I think I counted the phrase 'noble sacrifices' four times in the space of a week, together with whole mess of bullshit about the hand of interplanetary friendship reaching out across the depths of etc., etc. Yeah, gloss it, polish it up, make it palatable and serve it up to the paying public. And let's face it, it's their credit that pays the editors' monthly cheque, right? But what Starfleet forgot to mention and what the press neglected to pick up was the Gork family. No, you won't have heard of them. Nor will you. Their mother wired them all into the house — ring-main, then hooked herself up and threw the switch. Don't be hard on her: her husband was on Vega 19.

Convoy 12. I was on that run, commanding the Cronus, a Zeus-class cruiser, she and the Hera assigned as a 'further precaution'. No one told us against what. I don't think even Starfleet knew.

Hyperspace is boring. So is convoy work. Imagine putting the two together. It's like trying to shepherd a bunch of excited schoolkids on a high speed field trip: keep in line, don't touch anything and if I see you do that again, Zankowski, junior, it's home for you, son. It was a lot like that. I think we were all relieved when we exited hyperspace and the stars came back on screen.

There's a lot of crap printed about a convoy run. If the press are to be believed, what we do when we exit hyperspace is lock on to pre-set coordinates and cruise majestically into orbit, puffed up and proud just to be there, to be part of the interplanetary helping hand. It's not like that at all. We arrive together, sure, but the warships detach, leave the rest of the fleet on hold while they scout around for a bit, make sure the coast is clear. If it is, then the freighters can move in.

'You'll have heard how the stardrive went critical just before impact, imploded and sent a cloud of boiling radiation swirling round the atmosphere'

That run, I assigned myself the inner planets. It may sound a big job but there's really nothing to it. All you do is station your ship somewhere off one of Mintaka 4's two moons, hold her steady for an hour or so and make a sensor sweep. Find anything, you just stay put and send one of the frigates to investigate. Doesn't happen often. Very rarely, in fact. That time, that first time, it did.

We'd picked up a ship. No, I don't mean one of ours. The sensors were going crazy, trying to figure out this weird shape and match it with any known design. They didn't do too well. Time, I thought, to take a look, before the whole goddamn system blew a fuse. Okay, so I just said that you sit tight and let the frigates do the dirty work. And yes, there's a certain sense in that; you don't take risks with high-value ships like cruisers. But this was different. No know design, in a system still being explored, near a planet in which we were taking more than just idle interest — it warranted that risk. We moved off station. My orders. My authority.

Herlam had already plotted a course. Headed right into Mintaka itself, they said. Sub-light speed but rising. Engines at full power. No response to communications. No detectable life on board. Impact in 9.8 minutes.

We got in as close as we could, just within visual range. She looked strange — but then you'd expect that about an alien vessel — kind of dumpy, sluggish, built for lugging rather than fighting. Not a warship. I had just enough time to register it all before Mintaka's light swallowed everything whole. She must have burned up seconds later. I did the necessary, made out a report later about the sighting, passed it on to Starfleet through the usual channels, and waited for the inevitable summons to the Board of Inquiry. It never came. Report's probably still stuck on some Admiral's desk

somewhere, waiting for him to take time out from screwing his secretary. It'll be there, somewhere. Maybe someone should dig it out. For the moment, we had a date with a planet.

Mintaka 4. There's not a lot to the place, really, no more than the newsmids gives you: I guess it isn't easy glossing up a dump. From space, it looks a kind of sickly yellow (that's the sand), except where it's sickly blue (that's the sea) and where it's a sickly off-white (that's the poles). Like I say, not much of it. We stood off, the warships, cruised around awhile looking arrogant, let the freighters get on with it. It went well. No problems. No losses. It was to be like that for the next two trips.

That period was like a kind of rest-cure, nothing much to worry us. Maybe we thought we'd licked the problem, whatever it was, just by sending a few extra warships. And let's face it, cruiser firepower is something you don't argue with. Things were even beginning to look routine. Same back home. World Aid 2 came and went: Proton Gutmeg hadn't gotten any better. 93 deaths. Two cases of ritual disembowelling, one of them on stage. The cops moved in, closed the show early. Then came the riots. Some senator with a few votes to win began asking questions about the cost of these little rescue jaunts. After all, he slimed, there was a whole mess of planets that needed help, and went on to cite a few. It worked up to a point, that point being when someone noticed that those same planets just happened to be in his marginal areas. Don't hear much from him, these days. Yeah, two runs grace. Milk runs each. Time to relax. Then came Convoy 15.

I won't forget that run. To cut the pulp, we had the usual tramp through hyperspace, came out and made our sweeps, then headed the freighters into orbit. We lined them up, nose to engines, 5,000 metres apart as per Starfleet procedure, and began putting on the spin. You keep it slow, controlled, so as to present each pod to the planet in turn. Then, when it's in the right position, you separate it for re-entry Simple, really. We thought so, too. Then 939, third in line, blew up.

The conkunk went wild, everyone asking everyone else what the hell was going on. Everyone but me. I'd been watching operations from the bridge, saw the first flicker of light around the Vega's engines, saw it bloom into full glory. I saw the steel twist and erupt, the bodies of men and women sucked into space. I watched as their blood boiled and they died, saw their spirits parting from their bodies. And I watched as, slowly, incredibly, each disembodied aura began the long tumble to the planet below. Down instead of up. Snared instead of freed. It was then that I guessed — no, scrub that — then that I knew.

There's not much left to tell, just maybe bring things up to date and leave you with a few questions. We lost another five ships from that convoy alone, four loaded with grain, one with agradiuers, paleontologists, irrigation experts and the like. A lot of people. A lot of food. And since then? Starfleet don't like to say much, but the average loss rate remains at about that level for each trip.

But still we keep sending them: public opinions won't budge and the press always did prefer a dead hero to a live father. Crazy part about it is that even though I knew, I couldn't tell anyone. No one would ever believe me. Not unless they had my sight. But like I say, we're rare.

The convoys have gone on, ships have been lost, and a whole lot of people have died and more than died. Starfleet's now muttering about sending a carrier. That's one hell of a ship for just convoy work. A hundred and twenty starfighters. Six thousand crew. And still they don't know what they're playing with.

So, why a scoutship? Simple. Someone's got to put a stop to it, and that someone's gonna have to be me. No one else knows. By the time this tape is delivered, you'll have heard it all, how Willard Bastard Horver, crazed captain and mass murderer, ordered his other two crew members into the lifeboat on the pretext of some malfunction, ejected and dived his ship into the very planet he was supposed to be helping to save. You'll have heard how the stardrive went critical just before impact, imploded and sent a cloud of boiling radiation swirling round the atmosphere. And you'll have heard how everyone down there died. Slowly. Horribly. They'll deserve it. As for our own people there, well, that can't be helped; sometimes, you have to cause a little grief to achieve a little good.

I wish I had some proof to give you, but what is there that would stand up in court? And let's face it, no forensic lab in the galaxy will back me. Maybe instead you should start asking a few questions. Like why do our ships keep getting destroyed? Why do we lose only a few at a time — enough to cause us grief, sure, but not enough to stop us going? Why in the middle of a planetwide famine are there no bodies, no graveyards? And that alien ship, a freighter?

Engaged in the same merry dash as us? Answers still not coming? Then ask Starfleet if Captain Harding of the Castor expedition has recovered from his mysterious and debilitating illness yet. You remember that picture of his hand holding that kid's? No. My sight won't work with a photograph, but I'll lay odds on what was happening at the time.

I wish there was some other way. I also wish I was wrong. But there isn't — and I'm not. I'm not because, well, just take a look back into folklore: the idea of demons devouring souls isn't such a new one. And there isn't because no one'll listen. That and... let's just say I've been looking at myself lately. There's a dark haze forming round my chest, round about where the lungs are reckoned to be. It's been there for a while, now. I don't think it's going to go away.

KYLIE BEVAN is what many might term an inveterate SF junkie. Indeed, the first book she can recall reading as a child was one of Angus MacVicar's 'Lost Planet' series. She is 37, lives at present near Newbury and is currently busy with pen, paper and imagination. This is not her first time in print.

FICTION FILE 43

ROBERT RANKIN



Robert Rankin is a man who has seen the swinging 60s and lived, although the way he tells it it was a close run thing... Colin Munroe investigates.

Robert Rankin is not only a 60s survivor, he's also a man who knows his own mind. When asked if he had any major regrets in life, he replied without hesitation: 'Just one... I wish I'd thought of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles first!'

Rankin's work contains elements of horror, humour, science fiction and fantasy. How does he categorize his fiction? 'I suppose I'd describe it as far-fetched fiction, tall stories. It's very hard these days to categorize anything. Science fiction, for example, once upon a time it was all space-ships and death rays. Now we've moved away from Doc Smith and Heinlein and into much more diverse fields. Having said that, my new trilogy 'Armageddon' could broadly be described as science fiction. Certainly the reviews to date of the first book in the series have treated it as such.'

Before becoming a writer, Rankin, a self-confessed ancient hippie — 'The 60s were absolutely wonderful. Sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll' — tried his hand at a number of jobs (the actual number being quite a big one — in the high 30s at least). But while at art school he discovered that he 'was singularly ill-equipped to actually do anything in the real world'. Not that he did the obvious and became a writer straight away. Instead 'I really just wasted my life between the ages of 20 and 30... Things came to a head when I found myself working as an 'invoice registration clerk' for a construction company. The job was so boring and I seemed to

have so much time on my hands that I was almost forced into writing just to pass the days.'

His first novels — the Brentford books — met with a certain amount of success, but nothing like that won by Douglas Adams or Terry Pratchett. It was unfortunate that *The Antipope* [the first in the series] was published just a few months after my publishers had launched *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*. When it came to promoting my book, we weren't exactly left with a huge advertising budget. Initial sales of *The Antipope* were only around 30-40,000. With the next two books the *Brentford Triangle* and *East Of Ealing* we come back to the problem of categories. Nobody seemed to know what sort of animal they were dealing with and as a result there was a lot of uncertainty as to which sector of the market they should be targeting. It was all a bit of a cock-up I'm afraid.'

His latest work *Armageddon The Musical* [see review elsewhere in this issue] benefited from some more astute PR. Little boxes containing a Brussels sprout and a note proclaiming that the sprout's name was Barry, and that it was here to save the world landed on the book reviewers' desks. But, of course, the sprout was only part of it. It's a more complex story-line than any of my previous books, but as a result I found myself becoming very absorbed by it all. There's a lot going on in the book. I get enthusiastic about my writing and ideas as they occur to me.'

The rest of the *Armageddon* books are forthcoming, and the Brentford books are due to be rereleased. Is there any chance of a straight SF or horror story? 'I'd love to do one, but I'd be afraid that my warped view of the world would see me slipping banana skins under the feet of one of my characters. I don't think that I could really keep myself from introducing some element of humour into the book.'

FEAR FORUM

Letter writing has a long and noble history. Do your bit to make sure it doesn't die out - write to FEAR FORUM, NEWSFIELD, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1JW.

CONVERT CORNER

Dear FEAR

I am writing about issue 27 and the black arts section. I thought it was a really interesting read. I'm not a regular FEAR reader: in fact issue 27 was the first I have bought - but it won't be the last.

I think it would be a good idea, if you have the space, to print a few pages on the occult and the supernatural every month - including ouija boards and witchcraft etc.

I like the section reviewing the latest horror books and videos, and look forward to the next issue.

Darren Ward, Beeston, Nottingham

DO STUDIOS DREAM OF CUTTING FILMS?

Dear FEAR

In March 1992 it will be the 10th anniversary of the film *Blade Runner* and the untimely death of Philip K Dick.

As you may already know, *Blade Runner* was based on one of Dick's finest novels *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?* and was dedicated to him after his death. What you may not know, is that *Blade Runner* was drastically re-cut by the film studio after an initially disastrous preview run in Dallas.

I think it would be a fitting tribute if Warner Brothers could be persuaded to re-release *Blade Runner* somewhat closer to its original form to commemorate the writings of such a great SF novelist as Dick.

I know there are many people who agree with me and would be glad to see *Blade Runner* fully restored.

Nicholas Laslett, Kent

WHATEVER NEXT?

Dear FEAR

Normally I would not complain about this wonderful magazine. But... in FEAR 27 the 'next issue' bit said that you would be taking a look at *Highlander II* and *III*. Having read through FEAR 28 more than eight times, I find no mention of the above films. Why?

Glenn Kiley, Belper, Derbyshire

Whoops, we cocked-up, sorry. We're trying to get John Gilbert to contain his enthusiasm for announcing the appearance of things he's almost but not quite received from our writers. We did get an interview with *Highlander's* Michael Ironside in issue 28, hope you liked it.

THE DOG'S PINK BITS

Dear FEAR

I am not the sort of person who writes to magazines on a regular basis. Basically, I am one of the silent majority that are too apathetic about the world, universe and everything to do anything about anything unless I feel I must take a stand.

56 June 1991 FEAR

Compendium?

Anyway, I felt I had to put pen to paper to say that I wholeheartedly agree with R Clark's points (issue 27) regarding the treatment of Graham Masterton. Examples of this would be the length of time that the sequel to *Night Warriors* (the greatest story of all time, in my humble opinion) took to filter its way onto the bookshelves in this country and also the way some of his earlier stuff has been allowed to go out of print. Anyone heard of *The Sweetman Curve* or *Corroboree*? No, I thought not. I bet there isn't anyone out there who hasn't read some of Herbert's early excrement e.g. *The Fog* - I mean honestly, what a load of dog's bollocks!

I really think that Graham should take a leaf out of Shaun Hutten's book and appear on TV to plug his books, just to let people know that they exist! I didn't even know *Walkers* existed until I read R Clark's letter - which for me almost amounts to suicide!

I remember reading the Masterton interview in FEAR some time ago and mention was made of films being done from his books. I think *Charnel House* was one. Any news there?

In conclusion, I'd just like to say that good things come to those who wait and as long as Graham continues to produce masterpieces, one of these days, the industry will give him recognition for the talented author that he is.

Don Elliot, Nottingham

COLD SHOULDERED BY FEAR

Dear FEAR

I, like many others, bought FEAR 1 in July 1988 and started subscribing around issue 7. I have been on board through all those shaky 'finding your feet' early issues to today's slick, sharp publication.

The reason I picked your magazine was for the short story supplement in the middle from mainly unknown writers. It was refreshing to see someone with balls enough to tap into the vein of amateur talent that is obviously out there. I do however agree with those FEAR FORUM contributors who think the amateurs are being shouldered out by the more established writers who appear in FEAR 28 and three times.

Things come to a head when in one breath you proudly announced Andy Oldfield as an addition to your staff, then publish another of his stories. It's hard enough having to stand in line behind the priority given to professional authors without having such blatant nepotism thrown in our faces. Come on guys, stop pandering to the egos of the 'name' writers and give more first timers a chance.

As I said before, I've been with you since the beginning and it's the first sub-ject I've felt strongly enough to write in about, apart from the bloody patronising scull rating system which I feel didn't warrant a letter of its own.

Amanda Jane Clarys, St Helens, Merseyside

Andy's story wasn't so much down to nepotism as magazine scheduling. The story was submitted and accepted several months before he joined the staff of FEAR, it just happens that there is a considerable gap in the ordinary course of things between fiction being submitted, accepted and finally printed. The stories you read, appear chronologically in the

order which we receive them in - even those in this issue were on file quite some time before Andy Oldfield joined us.

With regard to the first-timers versus established writers issue. The truth is that we actively welcome submissions from first-timers, and print more such stories than any other professional genre magazine in the country, but we can only print those which are up to standard.

MINT SAUCE

Dear FEAR

I don't know about you, but I'm really looking forward to *The Silence Of The Lambs*. I love films with animals in.

Thanks for listening.

A Davies, Stoke on Trent

WOT, NO SEQUELS?

Dear FEAR

Firstly, I would like to say what an exciting and intelligent read your magazine is. The reviews are well balanced, sensible and informative, the fiction is often better than some which is commercially available, and Oliver Fry's amazing artwork goes without saying.

However, having been used to the high standard of your publication, I was very disappointed to see that you had let not only myself, but all of your readers down, by saying on the back page of FEAR 28 that you would provide the 'gun-shields and gothic-guards' in a *Battle Of The Sequels* in issue 29. I am sure that many other readers, like myself, have been waiting with baited breath to find out something about films such as *Star Wars 4*, *Aliens III*, *Batman 2* and *Turtles 2*, to name but a few. We looked forward with eager anticipation to March 14th so that FEAR could fill us in with some vital info. So why, oh why, did you let us down? Not even a mention of it, not the slightest hint of an explanation or an apology for this cock-up!

Please explain!

Owen Southwood, Suffolk

Ah. We have to own up to being caught red-handed on this one. By the time we realized that we wouldn't have the promised info, there wasn't time to print an apology, it's called living on the cutting edge of journalism. Unfortunately, we fell off the edge this time! We will, of course, be getting you as much info as and when we get it - *Alien III* in this issue, for instance. Meanwhile, the person responsible has been given the rubber truncheon treatment. Flowers and get well cards to John Gilbert...

Please explain!

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RADIO TIMES

Dear FEAR

In issue 28 it was a pleasure to read John Gilbert's comments about the radio in *Dark Playground*. For the past couple of years I have enjoyed listening to the radio, especially if there wasn't anything good within the genre on TV. On the regular John Dunn show on Radio 2, I have been authors such as Brian Aldiss, Ray Bradbury and James Herbert when their books have been printed. Clive Barker turned up late one night on an arts programme on the same channel.

Other than on old radio guests, it's a radio drama that I have enjoyed over the years from classics through to science fiction and horror. There have been two complete reruns of the classic SF serial

Journey Into Space which although dated is enjoyable in a simplistic way. *Dan Dare Pilot Of The Future* turned up in a four-part serial on Radio 4. Likewise *Superman* and *Batman*...

Unfortunately, I missed the recent *Fear On Four*. But more genre material on the radio is welcome and needed.

Howard Pell

GRAPHIC ACCOUNTS

Dear FEAR

Re: Graphic Detail. Okay, you want comment on a regular comic reader and think Graphic Detail is 'worthwhile'. Although usually by the time comics are featured here they are sold out, it is still interesting to find out what other people think of what I have read. It's also good to see reproductions of artwork from various titles as this could influence me in choice of future purchases.

May I suggest to Mr Lapworth that he doesn't read odd issues of *Doom Patrol* as he will never understand it this way. Okay, I don't pretend I understand where all the ideas come from and it is weird, but it is great. The way to understand it is never to miss an issue (a bit like *Twin Peaks*).

Re: Graham Masterton. I agree with you and R Clark. He is vastly underrated by publishers and the public. I generally read about three books a week and Masterton is one of my favourite authors. I have never been disappointed with one of his books (unlike Stephen King and definitely James Herbert).

Keep the phone compo. Thanks for stopping the things.

Re: records and computer games. The only part of your magazine I do not read.

Re: The Dark Side. I agree with you, it isn't pathetic, but it does suffer in comparison with you, so I don't buy it anymore.

Re: reviews. The front of FEAR states: Horror, Fantasy, Science Fiction, so thriller films such as *Nikita* don't belong in your magazine. And I would classify *The Flash* and *Captain America* as SF.

Keep up the good, very excellent, work.

C Mitchell, Tyne & Wear

VIVE LE DIFFERENCE

Dear FEAR

The difference is: FEAR is the product of one man's dark dreams. Whereas the other two are just a publisher's money lust.

Fond Adieu.

Neil Macleay, Harlow, Essex

ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

Dear FEAR

I'd like to express my appreciation of your Black Arts special in issue 27. I'm certain that it will become a collector's item in future years, heralding what I'm sure is a turning point in the horror genre. I was especially impressed by your educated commentaries, as well as Storm Constantine's 'Sex & Chaos' article which would have done credit to the most profoundly researched of occult zines. It is so good to know that we can expect a wealth of occult style fiction from authors who possess a deep knowledge and understanding of the subject.

There exists a threat to all of this happening of course. Fundamentalist Christians would like to deprive creative individuals such as Storm of her artistic success, and first sure as you and me of the right to read her work. Some readers may regard this as over-reaction, but can anyone tell me, after the despicable campaign these dangerous fanatics have waged against the occult itself, with all its vile accusations, why horror, fantasy and SF should be safe. The self-righteous bigots have tainted the reputations of those who possess infinitely more integrity and humanity than they themselves

could ever hope for. More than that they are actively attempting to prevent which, and paying from practicing their deeply held beliefs. For our own good, they will also try to get you and I to quit reading and writing. They want to put a stop to everything they don't agree with, and that includes horror.

As a writer and fan, I would encourage all of you to do a little heart-searching. If, like me, this threat to our freedom of expression concerns you, contact SAFF, 6-8 Burley Lodge Road, Leeds LS6 1QP. They have experience of dealing with all of this from the occult perspective, forming as they did after a fundamentalist, homophobic attack on the Sorcerer's Apprentice occult retail store.

If you don't care, then expect all your treasured books and magazines to disappear from the shelves within the next few years. After all, this is the apocalyptic decade, the decade of evangelism; at least according to these nutters. The problem is, they are extremely corrupt and powerful nutters. Come to think of it, owning a copy of FEAR 27 may carry a prison sentence if the fudgies get their way.

H Helson, Selkirk

GROW UP DEAR FEAR

I've been reading FEAR magazine now for about six months (*Slap reader hub*). Ed in charge of cheap jibes and thought it's time I stuck my twopenneth worth in about a recent addition to the inventory of the magazine. I am, of course, referring to your music reviews. I assume you must have had a lot to drink the

lunch-time you decided to go with it.

In the March issue, you review Steve Vai's latest ditty - hardly Macabre. If you're going to include fantasy and science fiction, then why don't you review folk (*We did Dancin'* - Ageing Hippie Ed) and traditional bands, and why not take a peek at Vangelis while you're at it! Not only that, the reviews are well out of date and your reviewers aren't up to the task.

While I'm mentioning the March issue, I shall have another dig. The Black Arts was a decidedly adult topic; you obviously thought so too, judging by the liberal use of adult cunts and jokes sprinkled throughout. I'm not whingeing about that, oh no; it's the lapses into utter childishness in certain parts e.g. the competitions. Obviously you want to cater for a wide audience, but is it really necessary to talk on the correct level at one point and then talk down to us on another? I think not. Still, I quite enjoyed the Black Arts pieces, especially the bit with the big S himself. Remarkably true, I thought.

A quick suggestion. See if you can get someone to do an article on the horror writers of the past and I don't mean Stephen King. Yes, we all know he's past it, but I mean the writers of old - Stoker, Dante etc.

Apart from the few minor whinges I've mentioned, you produce a most readable and interesting magazine and I shall continue to buy it, even if it is just for the high quality short stories. Many thanks for your time and effort in reading my letter.

N Evanson, Newcastle-upon-Tyne

FEAR

HORROR • FANTASY • SCIENCE FICTION •

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COVER DESIGN BY OLIVER FREY ISSN NO 0954-8017



Clare Short MP must be rubbing her hands with glee. She belongs to a slender minority of our Parliamentary representatives who would like to see horror films banished to licensed outlets where they could be out of the public domain. Her wish, and those of a few others who should be running the country instead of our minds, has partly been granted.

A week ago, I received a video industry report which suggests that while horror accounted for 34 per cent of the rental market in the mid-80s, scare films now only manage an appalling 7 per cent rating. The figure is disturbing given that the horror, fantasy and SF genres have never been so high in public esteem. We're getting good, unbiased, coverage in newspapers, television and radio. Everyone wants to understand why these fields hold such a fascination to such a diverse audience. Even mainstream film-makers are taking elements from the horror genre - while, admittedly, marketing people try their damndest to play down any frisson for the fear genre.

It is, however, impossibly tedious to see a flaw in the figures. The researchers classify horror films in terms of marketing and cliché. Stalk and slash movies, films with monsters in them, and anything in which an exploding head appears, can be described as horror, but when it comes to real terrors, madness or cataclysmic events, the emphasis is on the thriller, the mainstream, the general - anything to escape that horror or fantasy tag.

But, horror is not a static genre: it has changed considerably during the past two years, and that is, in part, why the empiricists are looking in the wrong place for this genre. They should include any movie which is meant to scare, terrify, or disturb. That fits in with the dictionary definitions of horror, fear and terror. The real problem lies with the powerful marketing cliques at some of the big film distributors who are unwilling to risk the mass market appeal of their babies by allowing horror to stick, like a Death's Head moth, to their packaging.

The battle rages as obvious genre films such as, at the lower budget end of the market even *Mirror Mirror* is labelled as a supernatural thriller, while, perhaps more seriously, *The Silence Of The Lambs*, which certainly fits the dictionary definition is frantically dug out of that hole by director Jonathan Demme. As director, it is his right to describe the film in any damn way he chooses: it is also the right of the marketers at the distribution company to mix their own visions of the films into the description of the movie

that will eventually prevail.

Perhaps it is the patently ludicrous claim that horror films can seriously damage your health, which we have explored and demolished ad infinitum in the past, that makes the marketers so jittery. If so, then they won't want the hundreds of thousands of horror fans who come to see their movies chattering up the auditoriums. The British are the worst offenders in the marketing stakes, but the Americans are almost as bad. We recently tried to get another interview with director David Lynch to announce the making of his new film *The Cabinet Of Doctor Ramirez*. Although it is a homage to *The Cabinet Of Doctor Caligari*, the unit publicist was of the opinion that FEAR was not the type of magazine he'd like to be associated with. That's surprising when we were contacted by his office about *Twin Peaks* and have had further contact with the man, who is currently blowing Saliva Bubbles. Such a negative approach to publicity just shows the often misplaced power that some of these frontline marketers have over film projects.

That said, my comments regarding some British distributors, made late last year, seem to have fallen on fruitful ground. Companies such as UIP, Rank and Warners now have a much better understanding of the way in which genres suck much of the blood from that infamous mass marketing term, The Mainstream. For ourselves, that means more money in the coffers and a broader base of film/video to cover: for the fans it means the exploration of new ideas and a widening of the genre boundaries which are, unfortunately, still stuck to by many genre writers.

Let's hope, however that we are winning the battle against bureaucratic censorship in some small way and defusing our opponents in the eyes of more reasonably minded people. It is a pity that we have to spend so much time defending such an essentially harmless area of entertainment. Maybe the real reason for the constant attacks on our humanity and right to watch what we want is that the rapists of the horror genre - to alter a phrase so beloved by the moral majority - are little more than jealous, unimaginative dolts who just want to stick their knives into those who want more than wet romanticism. If so, these armchair critics should leave us alone, or get an education in the area which they are so blindly trying to destroy.

John Gilbert

FEAR REVIEWS

Excellent
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

BOOKS

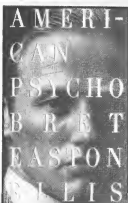
AMERICAN PSYCHO

Bret Easton Ellis
Publisher Picador
Format PB £6.99

This is the one that riled Simon & Schuster so much they refused to publish it – surrendering \$300,000 in advance fees. The book's protagonist is Patrick Bateman, 26, Wall Street yuppie, Harvard graduate, Donald Trump aficionado and serial killer. His world is New York in the late 80s – an aimless, vapid narcissistic society. Characters are faceless, featureless clothes horses: we learn nothing about them except their wardrobe – 'I'm wearing a two-button wool suit with pleated trousers by Luciano Soprani, a cotton shirt by Brooks Brothers and a silk tie by

Armani' – their eating habits, workout habits, restaurants frequented. All wear rounded glasses, suspenders and their hair slicked back. (Their greatest fear is a receding hairline). Acquaintances (no one has friends) are constantly mistaking names. Ellis (author of *Less Than Zero* and *The Rules Of Attraction*) has called this a noir version of *Bonfire Of The Vanities*.

What has caused all the fuss is the book's violence, particularly Ellis's description of it. The scenes of slaughter are described under the harsh glare of a porno movie spotlight – they're explicit, graphic – yet the book isn't pornographic. Once the murders begin (around a third of the way through, after what seems like an intolerable delay) beggars, women, children, dogs, all are disposed of in grotesque episodic fashion. Bateman keeps heads boiling on his stove, intestines rolled into balls on his glass top coffee table and three vaginas in his locker at the gym – his favourite adorned with a blue ribbon from Hermes. He lives in the same building as Tom Cruise – they meet in the lift. A child has its throat slit in the penguin enclosure at the zoo; prostitutes are forced to engage in lesbian sex before being decapitated, electrocuted, maced, eaten; and a hungry rat



is forced into a dying woman's vagina; nipples are bitten off, swallowed whole; eyes are burnt out with a Bic lighter; weapons include a nail gun, a chainsaw and acid.

This is not a pleasant novel. If Ellis's intention was to shock even those who normally claim to be unshockable, he has succeeded. There are times you feel the need to put the book down, for ever, unread, but the compulsion to continue is overbearing. To finish it becomes obsessive. The fact the book

is often morose, boring, intolerably protracted works in its favour; Ellis asphyxiates you with the m-motony of his language and the constant stupefying attention to product detail. (He even goes so far as to devote three chapters to Genesis, Whitney Houston and Huey Lewis and the News). It succeeds by reinforcing the theory of the banality of evil. Bateman's confessions of his psychopathic tendencies to fellow diners over expensive meals are dismissed as idle chatter; his preoccupation with mass murderers Ted Bundy and Ed Gein an amusing aside to this GQ man's character. He is seen as 'a bloody ass-kisser, a brown-nosing goody-goody,' too much 'the boy next door', to have committed these atrocities. He almost gets caught; but greed is his saviour.

Written in the first person, Ellis's nihilistic approach forces the reader to confront the intolerable, the unholy, the stench of corruption head on. It gives the book its resonance, its power, its strength, its defence against the trade of criticism and outrage levelled against it. (Violence against women, etc). This is a sickening minor piece that deserves to be read.

Mark Salisbury



THE DOORS OF PERCEPTION



FANTASY

The Alpha Box
Demon Blues
The Door Into Shadow
Exile
The Great Hunt
Storm Warriors



HORROR

The Face That Must Die
Hear The Children Calling
Lullaby
The Mammoth Book Of Terror
The Night Man



SCIENCE FICTION

Armageddon The Musical
Better Than Life
Dracula Unbound
Gypsies
Stranger In A Strange Land
The Jonah Kit



THRILLER

American Psycho
Homme Fatale

NON-FICTION

Gauntlet
Revision
Wolves And Werewolves

GYPSIES

Robert Charles Wilson
Publisher Orbit
Format PB £3.99



Robert Charles Wilson has the wonderful ability of being able to centre a novel in one genre, usually science fiction, but then expand his story to take in other areas of the literary marketplace. His three other British published novels, *Memory Wire*, *A Hidden Place* and *The Divide*, have already increased his popularity in the SF and Fantasy camps, and *Gypsies*, a strange amalgam of both those genres, is likely to garner him a lot more critical praise and, perhaps push him that closer to being a genre bestseller.

His new book starts with a heroine – unusual in an SF novel. Karen White has the ability to open doors between other dimensions and universes. It is a power that she and her brother and sister inherited. As she gets older it fades. But now, as her son is approached by the enigmatic Grey Man – a green man figure by any other definition – it remanifests itself. Terrified by the sudden incursion of this man who had, until now, only haunted her childhood dreams, Karen decides to investigate his origins. That means coming to terms with her own reality and then facing the awesome secret of her past.

Character-based rather than plot driven, *Gypsies* is reminiscent of the golden age of SF, when everything was new and wonderful. Wilson is like a



genius child in a toy garden of his own creation. Only he knows how to manipulate the mechanisms, but when he does they make sweet music. John Gilbert



HOMME FATALE: A NOVEL OF DESIRE

Paul Mayersberg
Pulitzer Century
Format HB £12.99



This erotic thriller is a debut novel by Mayersberg, but he's already had plenty of writing practice working as a Hollywood scriptwriter (his credits include *The Man Who Fell To Earth* and he's also directed three of his own scripts, including *Nightfall*). As you might expect there's a strong visual element, in fact the most powerful sections of the book develop from images. The book opens with a Louise XX-like woman dragging an apparently dead blonde down a hotel corridor. It's an unusual image, described in great detail, and comes to obsess the man who observes. George Elliott is an exceptionally handsome Hollywood agent, but he's grown tired of his girlfriend and begins fantasizing about what led to the hotel scene. Later on one of Elliott's clients comes to him "with the idea for a screenplay developed from erotic black-and-white photos by a New York fashion photographer. You get the feeling much of the impetus for this book came from such photographs. But this is no bad thing, Elliott's obsession takes the reader along. As a lookalike of the hotel woman replaces his secretary, the erotic pull is strengthened by curiosity as to what's happening behind the scenes. Who is this woman really?

Ursula, it turns out, is no less obsessed by Elliott. In fact Ursula's obsession is both extraordinary in the actions to which it drives her, and also in its depiction. Pages of intricate detail about Ursula's dress, perfume and even porno movie appearances are strangely enough not matched by a like intensity in Ursula's perception of Elliott. As the novel alternates chapters narrated by Elliott then Ursula it loses momentum.



Increasingly I got the feeling the clever title, which is elaborated within, is being superimposed on the original driving force. Elliott's infatuation with Ursula, turning Elliott into a male *femme fatale*, a beautiful creature which drives his lover into desperate measures, is the sort of 'high concept' which drives movies. It's a simplistic inversion unbalanced by the fact that Elliott's passion is always more believable than Ursula's.

By the last third I found the characters really quite unbelievable. Once the two have finally bedded down together narrative tension is fuelled by increasingly bizarre actions by Ursula. You read on out of simple curiosity rather than any involvement with the characters. Nevertheless for its early erotic kick, stylish writing and some neat asides on Hollywood *Homme Fatale* will be well worth a look when it arrives in

paperback
Stuart Wynne



HEAR THE CHILDREN CALLING

Clare McNally
Publisher Corgi
Format PB, £3.99



I have been following Clare McNally's career through the famous *Ghost House* trilogy, but only from afar — from as far as the covers, actually. But, having been drawn by the unusual cover art on *Hear The Children Calling*, I thought it warranted a closer inspection.



The premise is not initially inspiring, having been done somewhat differently, and more chillingly, by James Herbert in *The Dark*. A number of psychic children are killed in a fiery accident. Everyone believes they are dead, even the parents. There was incontrovertible proof, but one of the mothers is contacted by a psychic who professes that the children are alive but in great spiritual danger. She begins to believe, despite the initial doubts of the other parents, and then she is victim to a terrifying psychic attack in which she is told not to search for her son.

However, once the other parents begin to receive chilling, pleading, messages from their children, they band together and decide to fight the evil which has taken the children. If all this sounds like a play and expansion on *Pottergeist III* — without the underground burial chamber — it is! It's a combo of several ancient storylines which are admittedly knitted together in a competent, and sometimes above average, ghost story. The characterization is sharp and the style eloquent, but die-hard horror fans will find the subject matter decidedly pallid. McNally is a great writer in search of a story, and when she finds it the first ranks of horror had better watch out. John Gilbert



ARMAGEDDON THE MUSICAL

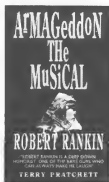
Robert Rankin
Publisher Corgi
Format PB £3.99



Just when you thought that the stylistic ghost of Douglas Adams's terribly seductive, interestingly structured sentences with their lovingly crafted adverbial phrases had stopped serving as grammatical models for other would-be humourists and wannabe tax-exiles, along comes Robert Rankin and his time-travelling

Brussels sprout which is all well and good and occasionally very funny, if not quite as sharp as his prestigious forebear's justly famous prose.

The idea — or rather one of the ideas, for there are many — behind this book is ludicrously good, the affairs of a post-holocaust Earth are being subtly influenced by an extraterrestrial production company who then broadcast the ensuing misery, gloom, torrid sex and high jinks to alien TV broadcasting companies. But after the award winning nuclear war the viewing figures are falling off. Some rising young execs want to beef the drama up an extra notch, Armageddon no less, but they're constrained by the terms of the script. Not that the more unscrupulous are overly concerned about such matters. One exec travels back in time courtesy of an intelligent Brussels sprout, who adopts the name Barry, ostensibly to persuade Elvis Presley to become a draft dodger and thereby change the course of history for the benefit of future ratings.



Of course, all this achieves is a whole bunch of plot diversions, theological warfare, some whacko neo-political developments with the Buddhist network, and Rex ruining his sister's bid when he takes a crap in it. Thank God that Jesus' twin sister has an explanation that sort of ties everything together at the end!

Ever since Adams did to wider public applause what Robert Shekley had been doing some years before, funny SF has been even harder to get away with. So full marks to Rankin for managing it. Still, it's a shame that the internal reading voice keeps slipping into a Peter Jones lit — except for the very rude bits, and there's one or two of those.

Andy Oldfield



THE JONAH KIT

Ian Watson
Publisher Gallancz
Format PB £3.99



This 1975 reissue is a novel of ideas, a slender novel which takes time to elaborate all manner of speculative theories. In essence there are two bizarre concepts driving two alternating narratives. Perhaps the most incredible, considering its contemporary setting, is the Soviets' development of a technique whereby a being's mind can be recorded and then imprinted on the brain of another being. One narrative follows the adventures of a whale imprinted with a cosmonaut's mind. This first-person tale is one of the most ambitious and satisfying aspects of the book, dramatic but also quite thought provoking in a zoological kind of way.

The second narrative revolves around Dr Paul Hammond whose latest scientific discovery indicates that our physical universe is merely the debris from the creation of a 'true universe'. Naturally this theory has a shattering impact on many religions and also more individual beliefs. People gather at Hammond's observatory, troops are sent and a riot seems inevitable.



For much of the book there seems little connection between the two narratives, but toward the end everything is very neatly tied up and nicely rewards the reader's patience. However patience is needed because *The Jonah Kit* is not content to merely play with such dizzying concepts as 'real universes' and Quantum Physics's baffling Schrödinger's Cat (poorly explained, as it happens), in addition Watson goes for a 'literary' sort of portrayal of his characters. Dr Hammond is locked in a love triangle with his predictably neurotic, fifty wife sleeping with one of his assistants. There's almost a Hemingway sort of feel to this narrative which is ambitious without ever being wholly convincing. It's a bit too familiar, particularly the errant nympho wife. The situation is made worse by the elaborate scientific theories which can stretch over pages, speculation which the characters and plot occasionally seem to be interruptions to rather than integral dramatizations of. Nevertheless this thoughtful book does come together well by the end and is well worth a look from people wanting something quite a bit more ambitious than the normal SF thriller.

Stuart Wynne



GAUNTLET

Edited by Barry Hoffman

Gauntlet started life as a little magazine, but is now an annual trade paperback. Reading more than 400 pages 'exploring the limits of free expression' (as the line beneath the title has it) sometimes feels like listening to a crowd all arguing at once, but if the book achieves its stated aim — as I think it does — this is inevitable. Certainly no reader is likely to finish the book without having been shaken up and made to think.

Some of the contents will be of particular interest to readers of *FEAR*. Howard Worm surveys school censorship of Stephen King, including a call to ban *The Shining* because of a 'reference to demonic possession', and King discusses film censorship (oddly, claiming that the 'British Film Board' rated *Crepuscule M'* rather than *AA* and that *The Evil Dead* was 'closed down'), as do Wes Craven, Carpenter, Raimi and others. Ray Bradbury contributes

two rare tales (one a precursor of *Fahrenheit 451*) and an interview. Graham Masterton, who found the sex in *Helraiser* objectionable, is represented by a tale of sex and violence, and there is also strong fiction from Ronald Kelly (a Christian horror writer) and Richard Chizmar. Most fun is a Bill Relling tale censored by Avon from Tom Montelone's *Borderlands*, though KL Jones' *Rushdie* story runs it close.

At times the book offers two sides of an argument — about identifying victims of rape, for instance, and 'outing' gay activists forcing public figures who are closet homosexuals to come out — while in other instances an argument made by one piece may be answered, perhaps coincidentally, by another. Thus Andrew Vachss' vignette about paedophilic computer simulations, which I confess to finding somewhat pointless, gets a kind of response from Karl Edward Wagner's Poe-esque satire. (In this context I should note an admirably honest essay by a victim of paedophilia, Ron Leming). Gary Brander's complaint about censorship (some of it certainly absurd) by minority groups seems to me to be put into perspective by Bentley Little's point that protest is not the same as censorship, even if while making it Little cites women as a minority group. Myself, I'd say that freedom of expression is vital but that those of us who wish to use it have to be prepared to justify it, otherwise we ally ourselves with the censors.



Some of the contents of *Gauntlet* are graphic — censored images from *Raw*, the rape strip from *Hot Box*, the 'false witness' (as Steve Bissette sums it up in his article) of *Seduction Of The Innocent* Revised. Most readers, however, may be most disconcerted by a conversation between two men convicted for serial killings, Gerald Schaefer and Ted Bundy, about their methods and pleasures. It rather puts *American Psycho* into context (a book of which there are two views in *Gauntlet*, incidentally).

Luckily there is comic relief of a kind. Rick Hautala tells of the toning down of his novel *Nightstone* by a copy editor (in which 'fucking-A' became 'Oh, bloody damn') — a writer's nightmare of the kind which Richard Laymon describes in *The Stake*. A school banned *The Hobbit* for promoting Satanism. Burger King apparently regrets having advertised during a telecast of *Throw Momma From The Train* because the film contained a number of euphemisms for sex. Dr PR LeNado says *STAMP OUT SCIENCE FICTION NOW!* and you can find his address in the book, along with much more which you can discover if you buy it. Otherwise, to conclude on a personal note, there may not be a third

volume, containing the story I censored from *Scared Stiff*.

Gauntlet is \$8.95 from 309 Powell Road, Dept R91, Springfield, PA 19064, USA. Add \$3 for surface mail, \$6 for air mail. Make cheques payable to 'Gauntlet' in US funds only.

Ramsey Campbell



LULLABY

Diane Guest
Publisher Fontana
Format PB £3.50



Not to be confused with Jessica Palmer's recently released novel *Dark Lullaby*, *Lullaby* nevertheless takes up that same

theme of the child in peril which Virginia Andrews often made her credo.

The story is also disappointingly similar to every other such tale in this romantic kill or damage a kiddie subgenre. Rachel Daimler inherits an old house at Land's End into which she moves, taking her husband Judd and two young daughters, Emma and Addy. The kids fall in love with the rambling old place, but soon the cosy, close-knit family begins to fall apart. The spirit of the place, a tiny, lonely, and hurt child ghost, makes its presence felt and, shortly after, the first manifestation, Addy begins to look pale and feel cold. Could this be possession? Well, that's for you to decide dear reader, if you get that far.

This type of book appears to be par



for the course this month and, as with the Clare McNally book which I have reviewed elsewhere in this issue, this

GROKING IS FULLNESS

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

Robert A Heinlein
Publisher NEL
Format HB £15.99



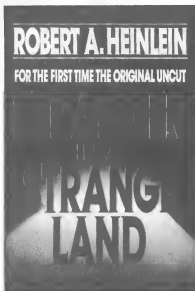
It takes a big book to 'question every axiom of Western culture' — which was Heinlein's intention when he published *Stranger In A Strange Land* back in 1961. It was a big book then, and now it's an even bigger book. Heinlein had to cut about 60,000 words to placate his publishers back in 61. But now they're back in and the unabridged version runs out at close to a quarter of a million words.

But how do you set out to question everything which we take for granted? Even our biological nature is moulded and socially conditioned in such fundamental ways that not only do we have received notions about what constitutes the really real, metaphysical truths and aesthetic beauty, but we also operate according to rigidly enforced sets of agendas covering such trivia as how we copulate, dress ourselves, go to the lavatory etc. If we're so fundamentally constrained by society, what chance do we have of understanding ourselves and of stripping away the veneers to reveal our underlying selves?

Social anthropologists ask the same sort of questions, and one technique they employ to overcome cultural bias and subvert their own conditioning is to observe society at work but with the frame of mind that asks: 'What would a man from Mars make of the way this society runs and the ideas it embraces?'

Heinlein literalizes this perspective by bringing Valentine Michael Smith, a man from Mars, to Earth and confronting him with a series of Western role models ranging from Jubal, a kindly old liberal/anarchic father figure, assorted political bit players, crass materialists and religious charlatans/messiahs... and plenty of sex to confuse and complicate the interpersonal relationships too. The satire is sharp and for the most part still as depressingly apposite as it was 30 years ago.

While the main vehicle for the story is the man from Mars' attempts to grok (a Martian word which translates unsatisfactorily to 'understanding', slightly more satisfactorily to the technical sound



science use of the German 'verstehen', and more satisfactorily still to the Buddhist 'satori') the fullness of humanity. It also raises hopes of other questions, many of them about Heinlein, and in turn ourselves, such as: is/was this really a revolutionary novel or merely the jaundiced smugness of a white liberal opinionated reactionary mouthing off his own prejudices? There are strong arguments to be made either way, and in engaging those the book accurately reflects the cultural schizophrenia and contradictions underpinning Western society.

Stranger In A Strange Land annoys, irritates and upsets people of differing and opposing ideologies and beliefs, that alone is a tribute to the success that Heinlein enjoyed with it. It's a big book because it includes all of us. It's a worthwhile book because it draws us into a debate about the nature of our attitudes and beliefs. It's a good book, because it works on the level of a satisfyingly crafted piece of fiction. It's a book which ought to be read by everyone, at least once.

Andy Oldfield



author is obviously a talented writer. Unfortunately, she is stuck in a subgenre rut which has been propagated by publishers after Virginia Andrews' death and John Saul's last child in peril novel. My advice to her is that emotion and character can be built into other, more mainstream, types of novel. My advice to the potential reader is avoid this book in favour of the real, if increasingly old, thing — no writer, or marketing concept, can ever replace the original freshness of Andrews and Saul.



THE GREAT HUNT: BOOK TWO OF THE WHEEL OF TIME

Robert Jordan
Publisher Orbit
Format HB £13.95



Never have so many words been spilled for so slim a cause.

The first tome in Jordan's Wheel of Time trilogy was a wonder to behold. The characters were vivid, the passions high, the description almost edible, but the second book fails to shine in 598 pages — with a whopping great glossary — mainly, I suspect, because the author is fulfilling a formula rather than extolling a true love for what is going on to the page. It is what now separates this book from the works of others such as Tolkien and Tad Williams. There might even be a case to be made that the long names which so pepper the text might put off even the keenest TSR dungeon master. Even the interior cover artist seems to have given up the job with a depiction of the book which could very well come from the clichéd backwaters of Dungeons and Dragons product.



Fans will, of course, be interested in the continuing storyline so, like a Dynasty preamble, here goes. The Horn of Valere, which will raise a band of heroes from another age who will then restore peace to the land, has been rediscovered, and then quickly stolen. The hero of the first novel, who has the unenviable name of Rand al'Thor, is still struggling with his equally unhappy fate: that he is the Dragon Reborn, a man who will destroy all those whom he holds dear. He also has to contend with the dreams of the Dark One who also has an unfortunate, though historically interesting, name: Bal'azamon. He also has to contend with death threats and, of course, a quest to find the Horn of Valere. It all sounds pretty intriguing, so why, instead of an action-packed thriller of a book do we get a mountain road of

a tome, winding upward, broken by crossroads of grimace evoking verse — 'The blood feeds blood. Blood calls blood. Blood is, and blood was, and blood shall ever be... until my pen runs out of ink' — and apparently inconsequential, if occasionally diverting, sub-plots? Unless I find the answer to those questions, I shall not be investing the time required to read this in this series.

John Gilbert



WOLVES AND WEREWOLVES

John Pollard
Publisher Hale
Format PB £5.95

Originally published in 1964 by the author of *The Long Safari*, this classic book looks at the reality behind the apparently grisly history of the werewolf.

Pollard traces lupine culture around the world, through England, Wales, Scotland (as late as the 18th century), Russia and Poland. He talks about the general wildness of the wolf, attacks made on humans and the resultant folklore which has spawned such stories as Little Red Riding Hood.

He leaves the reader in no doubt that the wolf and its fictional counterpart, the werewolf, can be voracious hunters, but moderates the cruel tone of other commentators and describes wolves as creatures of necessity, killing ruthlessly and cunningly for food and destroying their enemies, including man, wherever necessary. Pollard also shows that there are different types of wolf and that they are not all evil animals.

The picture built of the wolf in this classic book is worth a gander by any serious horror enthusiast. It describes the lupine influence on fiction and gives reasons, such as hydrophobia, for the werewolf syndrome. So, it's not a book to be sniffed at, especially if your sister is a werewolf.

John Gilbert



EXILE

RA Salvatore
Publisher Penguin
Format PB £4.50



Just to prove that Games Workshop don't have a monopoly on these RPG-style novels the latest TSR offering is here. Titled *Exile* it charts the travels of a dark elf called Drizzt Do'Urden and his magical cat Guenhwyvar through the subterranean world of the Underdark. Outcast by his family, Drizzt is forced to survive in the dark, dark caverns that are filled with many nameless horrors, but in doing so a darker more primitive part of his psyche starts to appear. This worries him because in his primitive rage he is just as likely to damage friend as well as foe, so he decides to seek company with a band of deep gnomes. Elves and gnomes aren't friendly at the best of times, so they take Drizzt captive and plan to kill him, until a gnome called Belwar recognizes him as the elf who saved his life years before, and now he repays the debt.

Meanwhile the rest of Drizzt's family are after his blood, apparently years before Drizzt's actions put his family out of favour with their evil spider goddess Lloth. But now Drizzt's mother has made a pact with Lloth to regain favour, Drizzt's dead father, formerly the best



weapons master in the land (Drizzt now holds that honour) has been brought back to life as a zombie animated by Lloth's evil. His mission is to kill Drizzt, but our pointy eared pal catches wind of the plot (must have been too many chicken tikka's) and with Belwar for company legs it. Along the way they encounter many creatures and generally spend most of the time either running from, or fighting a variety of Underdark denizens. And all the time the animated corpse is hunting them down. In short, *Exile* is as good as (if not better) than a lot of the Games Workshop offerings.

Mark Caswell



THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF TERROR

Edited by Stephen Jones
Publisher Robinson
Format PB £5.99



Stephen Jones quite rightly states that 'terror' is quite a different thing to 'horror'. According to the Oxford Dictionary, 'terror' means 'extreme fear' while 'horror' is a 'painful feeling of loathing and fear'. Already, the diagnosis shows terror to be the purer emotion, but Jones goes further and qualifies these supposedly didactic generalizations by saying that terror 'has always conjured up a more refined image than its much maligned stable-mate, horror'.

It is, indeed an elderly word, much used by the pulp press of the early 40s and 50s, but I am a little suspicious of Jones's approach — it could all be a ploy to produce yet another bulky anthology — though I must confess that his editorial note for a good tale is as sharp as ever.



His first choice is Clive Barker's *The Last Illusion* — the first story Barker published about his occult detective Harry D'Amour. Harry always seems to be encountering demons, and in this tale the trick is no different but, unlike many contemporary horror stories, it is not limited in scope, and promises, or perhaps I should say demands, more

from its author and protagonist in tales as yet untold.

The story following 'The Last Illusion' has to be good for the anthology to work and, in its own way, it is. David Schow's 'Bunny Didn't Tell Us' is humourously grotesque, written in a simple see-it-all style reminiscent of pulpdom.

Lisa Tuttle's 'The Horse Lord' is one of my favourites from this collection. She continues to push out some of the most innovative fiction in the horror/terror field while failing to achieve the mass market stature that she deserves.

There's also Ramsey Campbell's ghostly 'Out Of Copyright' and Karl Edward Wagner's 'The River Of Night's Dreaming' — the title being taken from the Rocky Horror Show lyrics. My favourite two from the latter half of the book are Brian Lumley's Lovecraftian story 'The House Of The Temple', and Graham Masterton's 'Pig's Dinner'. I will never forgive the latter for this particular story!

Although the chronic fan will probably have read most of these stories, Jones has done the newcomer a favourite by resurrecting them in one new volume.

John Gilbert



BETTER THAN LIFE

Rob Grant and Doug Naylor
Publisher Penguin
Format PB £3.99



As all fans of the TV series will know the Red Dwarf is a mining ship that is three million years from Earth and crewed by the half-insane (and possibly half-human) Lister, a mutant feline called the Cat, a fussy mechanoid called Kryten, a bobby hologram called Rimmer and a senile computer called Holly. *Better Than Life* logically enough begins where *Red Dwarf* — *Infinity Welcomes Careful Drivers* ended. Lister, Rimmer, Kryten and the Cat are in the middle of a game called *Better Than Life*. It plugs directly into the player's brain and takes over both his conscious and subconscious mind, thus creating the perfect dream. The only problem is that your physical body eventually dies through neglect. But after several misadventures (mainly on Rimmer's part) the crew of the Red Dwarf finally escape back to reality, to find that they are in trouble in the real world as well.

Holly has for some reason become very stupid and on the advice of a talking toaster tries a very dangerous experiment to regain his four IQ. It works (to a point), he now has an IQ of twelve thousand but only three minutes of run time left, so he promptly shuts himself down along with the rest of the ship. The rest of the crew play pool with an icy planet which is hurtling towards them, lose Lister on said planet, enter a black hole, find a sixty-year-old Lister on their return and are attacked by a vicious polymorph. A polymorph is a genetically mutated creature that can mimic any shape and feed on the emotions of others, so Lister loses his fear, Rimmer his anger, Kryten his guilt and the Cat his vanity.

The end result is that Lister wants to kill the thing with his bare hands, The Cat claims to be a non-entity so everyone ignores him, Rimmer wants to set up the 'Committee for the Liberation and Integration of Terrifying Organisms and their Rehabilitation Into Society' (but decides against it because the abbreviation is CLITORIS) and Kryten doesn't give a shit what happens to the rest of them. But then in the immortal




words of Arnold J Rimmer: who wants to tackle something with more teeth than the entire Cernom family? The TV series is a cut classic, and the two books released so far push it a few rungs up the ladder of success. Admittedly this isn't quite as good as the first book, but it will keep you amused and entertained from page one. And fans of the series will notice that many of the situations here are taken from the programme, although a lot of the humour is visual so it doesn't work quite as well in print (e.g. The Cat being chased through the supply deck by heat seeking missiles). But that slight niggle aside *Better Than Life* is worthy of purchase – especially now it's available as a paperback. Mark Caswell



DEMON BLUES

Esther Friesner
Publisher Orbit
 Format PB £3.99

 It's a lazy reviewer who resorts to analyses along the lines of 'this book is just like such and such, with a bit of what's thrown in for good measure'. Being more full of energy than a dead mouse is of maggots, I shall avoid that particular trap. In any case, Esther Friesner writes with a unique voice and I can't think of any comparisons with other writers which wouldn't need hedging with more qualifications than you get at a graduation ceremony.



Blending humour, fantasy and light satire, *Demon Blues* is the sequel to *Here Be Demons* and part three will doubtless be along soon.

Noel Cardiff doesn't realize that his mum was a demon – of the horny as well as horned variety – long before she got converted to mortality. But, when he gets an assignment from Yale to unearth his family tree, the truth is revealed and he discovers, to his interest, that he has fledgling magical powers himself. Someone else is also interested in his powers – Lysi, a less-than-subtle succubus who wants to turn his powers to evil and thereby trade his soul in so that her utterly evil father can be released from the hellish dimension that he's trapped in. Sadly, she falls in love with Noel, and he eventually reciprocates the emotion, but not before several layers of farce get compressed into a hilarious sandwich.

Plot complications include, in varying degrees and combinations: ex-demons who have now made the grade as angels, a gay Richard the Lionheart, a fervently heterosexual Salah-ed-Din, some crazy dudes who are into recreating ancient battles, and a highly improbable siege of Yale's library.

If I hadn't mouthed off about decent and honourable reviewing practices in the first paragraph, I'd probably end up

FRACTAL MATHS AND CHAOS

DRACULA UNBOUND

Brian Aldiss
Publisher Grafton
 Format HB £13.99

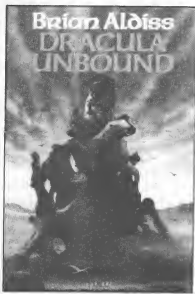


The standard advice to someone about to write a time travel SF story would be not to bother: there's a vast body of such fiction already infesting the remaindered shelves, it's been done to death, there's not a cliché left worth recycling... and so on. However, the problem with standard advice is that like common sense it's often proved to be completely out to lunch.

After *Frankenstein Unbound*, Brian Aldiss has now delivered *Dracula Unbound*, a heady time travelling story which delights in exploiting philosophical paradoxes to the full and employing chaos theory, fractal mathematics and some pretty nifty plotting.

Joseph Bodenland's problems start in earnest when a friend of his, Bernard Clift, discovers that humans *did* exist cotemporaneously with dinosaurs. Human remains in Utah are positively dated as being 65.5 million years old – which is a bit odd considering that one of the skeletons has a silver bullet lodged in it.

And then it's time for Bodenland to learn a few new steps in the dance of time. A time machine from the future appears over the Utah desert, Bodenland and Clift manage to get aboard. After overpowering the vampire driver, Bodenland controls of the time machine and lands in Victorian England where he seeks out Bram Stoker, who turns out to be the puzzled owner of the silver bullet dating back to prehistory. Together, they set out to destroy the ancient human-hating Dracula and his legions in a battle which involves more than garlic, holy water and wooden stakes – time and space are the arena for this particular moral struggle. Death becomes a mere variable as time



lines are crossed and recrossed and alternative biographies come into being. The extinction of entire species is at stake when Stoker, along with Bodenland and his family, reach a decisive point where the vampires can be snuffed out at source and the planet Earth and history altered for once and ever... possibly.

Dracula Unbound explores moral dimensions and dilemmas of the most gargantuan and convoluted kind. But it's also an excellent SF/horror adventure story which pulls the reader into its fast and turbulent flow of tension and ideas. Thank you, Brian Aldiss.

Andy Oldfield



by describing this book as an enjoyable cross between *Bewitched* and Tom Sharpe...

Andy Oldfield



THE FACE THAT MUST DIE

Ramsey Campbell
Publisher Macdonald
 Format HB £12.95



Arguably Campbell's most controversial contribution to the horror/thriller genre, *The Face That Must Die* has, for more than a decade, provided one of the most finely tuned and chilling first-hand accounts of a (homophobic) serial killer.

John Horridge starts his life of infamy as a stereotypical greasy little man with a large chip on his shoulder, most of which was fired during his unhappy childhood. He now lives in a grotty little flat which is situated in one of the grubbier areas of Liverpool. An increasingly vivid hatred of anything on two legs that does not share his point of view, coupled with the love of his cut-

throat razor, turns Horridge from wishful thinking to murder and his ultimate potential victim is Cathy, a woman who shares the same block of flats with this monster in the making. All that might sound somewhat conventional in this age of uncompromising books (some might say uncompromising filth) such as *American Psycho*, but whereas Ellis projects his psycho onto the screen of your mind, you'll find Horridge invading your psyche. *The Face That Must Die* seems more plausible, more ordinary, more frightening than *American Psycho* which is, after all, grossly written and irredeemably sickening.

Read and compare both of those books. The exercise will prove enlightening, say a great deal for the respective authors' literary motivations and illuminate two ends of a shrinking subgenre. In the final analysis, my money is on Campbell's much older book, but then, as the psycho said to the pool of blood, 'it's a question of taste'.

John Gilbert



THE NIGHT MAN

KW Jeter
Publisher Pan
 Format PB £3.99



Elsewhere in this issue of Fear is an interview with KW Jeter, in which he explains how horror is a literature tied to locale and how he sees the roots of horror embedded in the deep and fertile dirt of our past. *The Night Man* should be read in that context.

In small-town Midford is a county juvenile hall where Taylor works the night shifts. It's soul destroying enough working with the delinquents in his care, but to make matters worse he has to put up with the constant racket of nightly parties at the disused Drive-in next door where Felton, an ageing faggot jock supplies free beer and porno videos for the local school football team. The football team are, of course, assholes to a man – consummate all-American bullet-headed assholes. Complaining to the police does no good, they're as much in love with the team as Felton is.

However, Taylor's not the only one to have trouble from the team. A little boy, Steven, whose sister is on good



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fornicating terms with the team captain is always being bullied and cruelly teased by the team. Taylor is drawn in and tries to do what he can to help. But Steven isn't sure what sort of help he needs, and he befriends a strange man with a sleek black car who appears seemingly from nowhere. And then the team start getting paid back...

Violent, but not gory, this is a powerful story about the dark side of the human soul and the potency of anguished imaginations. It gets right inside the tiny minds of crass bigots and the mind-set of innocent victims alike, and by doing that faithfully and honestly it cements its horror in the all-too real. **Andy Oldfield**



REVISION

Kit Reed
Publisher Robinson
Format PB £5.99

Stop writing. Cut out any over-written material. Rewrite what, on second reading is not good enough. There, I've just summed up the sentiments set down in Kit Reed's addition to Robinson's worthy *Writer's Workshop* series of books.

Revision shows two main ways in which to prepare prose you've already written for publication. The first is to treat your work as a first draft and then to slowly and methodically go through it, incorporating new ideas you have and deleting any passages which are unnecessary to carry forward the story or show changes in character.

If, however, you're not comfortable with finishing a piece and then working on it in its entirety, you can choose to work through the second method, that of block revision. On the plus side, this technique allows you to revise as you go, but I've always found that time is a great distancing factor and that you can look at the prose you wrote two weeks ago more dispassionately than the words you wrote today or yesterday.

The book covers a lot of ground, often using a very simplistic style, posing a series of questions that you can answer systematically in order to change your work. It is another excellent addition to this continuing series, although it is also the most pedantic of the three to date. Professional writers of fiction and non-fiction should have it on their work shelf, together with the others in the series — *Plot and Character And Viewpoint* — while wannabes would do well to pick up copies for serious study. **John Gilbert**



THE ALPHA BOX

Annie Dalton
Methuen
Format HB £8.95

As well as writing for younger children, Annie Dalton also writes challenging books for older children which stand perfectly well as stories for adults: *The Alpha Box* is one such example.

Joss's parents have split up, he and his sister leave London and their father behind and go to live in the Midlands with their mother. Joss dreams of being a rock star, but he lacks the necessary belief in himself to uncover the music within. However, he meets up with Asha, a beautiful young thing who has a strange box which contains an essential magic and power. As it changes its own

form, it also wreaks subtle changes within Asha, over and above what adolescence normally does. And it has designs on Joss too. Asha suspects that the box and Joss's new electric guitar share the same source of power and could act as powerful conduits for good.

Meanwhile, another power is spreading its malevolent influence. A local rock band *The Hoarsemen* are making it big. Their hordes of zombie neo-Goth fans are growing in number, but wasting away in mind and body. Joss and Asha discover the source of *The Hoarsemen's* power, and what the immediate future is likely to hold — this ain't rock 'n' roll, this is genocide! As David Bowie puts it on *Diamond Dogs*. Let battle commence...

I don't know what it is, but over recent months children's fiction seems to be outperforming most of the adult stuff that we receive. *The Alpha Box* is no exception, the writing is excellent, the storyline moves along well, the characterization is spot-on, and the intermingling of fantasy and reality is handled superbly. **Andy Oldfield**



THE DOOR INTO SHADOW

Diane Duane
Publisher Corgi
Format PB £3.99

Suggesting that writers can escape from the *Star Trek* universe into the big bad real world of publishing, Diane Duane this month releases the second in her *Tale Of The Five* series.



The Door Into Shadow is another tale of elemental kingdoms, which focuses on *Freelorn*, an exiled prince of *Arlen*. He is the only man who can save the creative goodness of the Goddess from the infernal power of the *Shadow*.

As companions on his heroic quest, he musters a group which includes a master of the blue sword, a swordswoman who doubles as a sorceress and a fire elemental. They must enter the world of the Goddess through the round window, I mean, through the *Door into Shadow* which pits them against an evil which alone can defeat them all and blot out goodness forever.

Duane is a skilled writer who has often made the most mundane *Star Trek* plot into exciting entertainment. Her talents extend to the creation of original worlds and characters while her publishers are 100 per cent behind her. So, you can expect the name of Diane Duane canonized as one of this decade's most memorable SF writers. **John Gilbert**



RENTAL VIDEO

DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

Starring Joe Turkel, Will Bledsoe, Alan Blumenfeld, Robert Sampson, John Diehl, Wendy McDonald
Director DJ Webster
Cert 18, 87 mins



Mix *Alien* with the Bermuda Triangle, add a dash of Satan and you get the gist of this movie, which isn't as negative as it sounds: many a film has had more improbable ingredients in its plotline — and space SF offerings are in short supply these days.

It's 2022 and on a routine mission in lunar orbit Spacecore One loses its power. Being on the dark side of the moon all contact with HQ is cut.

Suddenly hope, in the form of an ancient space shuttle appears out of the dark. The crew of Spacecore One plan to raid it for air and spare parts to repair their own craft. On investigation they find it deserted and awash in salt water. Puzzlement turns to horror when they find a body with its stomach ripped open.

Getting the shuttle's computer online, the crew learn that the shuttle crash landed in the Bermuda Triangle some thirty years ago, and that by a spooky coincidence the amount of similarly missing craft to date — if they added their own — adds up to 666.

The dead crewman lumbers back to life with a diabolical creature erupting from his stomach. The Devil is aboard, and it turns out that he's set up a life destroying link between the Bermuda Triangle and the Moon.

More deaths and possessions occur



■ Dark Side Of The Moon, all the six's

as the flight lieutenant scours the ancient ship looking for the evil one.

While not original in concept (and inevitably derivative of *Alien*), the film is well produced, with good lighting, competent effects and model work end believable acting from the cast. Tension builds slowly but surely to a satisfying pace, and only the supernatural element is rather clumsily tied in and not made important or intriguing enough by the script to lift the plot into top gear.

A good piece of entertainment, nonetheless — with a good ending shot of the Devil's playground on the moon
Oliver Frey



FILM AND VIDEO



FANTASY

Ghost

The Twilight Zone



HORROR

Class Of 1999

Food Of The Gods II

Graveyard Shift

The Lair Of The White Worm

Nightbreed

Rawhead Rex

Slaughter High



SCIENCE FICTION

Arena

Highlander II

UFO Café



THRILLER

After The Shock

A Shock To The System

Catchfire

Goodfellas

Night Of The Fox

The Silence Of The Lambs

AFTER THE SHOCK: THE SAN FRANCISCO EARTHQUAKE

Starring Yaphet Kotto, Rue McClanahan, Jack Scalia, Scott Valentine
Director Gary Sherman
Distributor CIC Video
Cert PG, 92 mins



A James Bond villain (Kotto) and television Golden Girl (McClanahan) form the advance troupe in a dramatic (I use that in the fictional rather than the critical sense) reconstruction of the San Francisco Earthquake that took place over a period of just 18 seconds on October 17th, 1989.

According to the sleeve blurb, the tremor, which shook the Bay Area of Oakland and San Francisco measured a 7.2 on the Richter scale. It is a pity, therefore, that the quake could not have been recreated more faithfully in this docu-drama, which is a very distant cousin in terms of effect and character interaction when compared with Irwin Allen's famous disaster movie, *Earthquake*.

That is not to say that director Gary Sherman does not get some interesting performances from McClanahan, Kotto and Valentine. The one-on-one character pieces work better than the action sequences. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to over play in the all American way, turning what could have



been a fascinating insight into a natural tragedy into an extended soap episode.
John Gilbert



■ Stunned survivors, After The Shock

setting video screens alight all over Britain in the ugly, weird, thriller *Catch Fire*.

Foster plays the witness to a bloody mob murder while Hopper, who remains as hip as his beet generation persone in the early 60s, initially provides the heavyweight suspense and thrills as the sax playing hitmen who is assigned to rub her out. Meanwhile, the FBI is after her as a material witness.

Foster is not entirely happy with either of her apparent fates, but the tables are turned on the mob, in the person of the still chillingly effective Vincent Price, as Hopper falls for

CATCHFIRE

Starring Dennis Hopper, Jodie Foster, Dean Stockwell, Vincent Price, John Turturro, Fred Ward
Director Alan Smith
Distributor First Independent
Cert 15, 95 mins



They were the most electric big screen partnership of last year, and Dennis Hopper and Jodie Foster are about to go to it again,



Foster's body. As a result a great deal of sex mixes with the tension during a thrilling, if perhaps overlong, chase through the desert.

Hopper and Foster are excellent costars. In fact, it makes a change to see the older man involved with the younger girl when he has such stiff competition from Stockwell as the younger male lead. It's feisty stuff and well worth the skull rating I'm about to give it. Go to it. John Gilbert



GOODFELLAS

Starring Ray Liotta, Robert De Niro, Joe Pesci
Director Martin Scorsese
Distributor Warner Home Video
Cert 18, 90 mins



Scorsese's *Goodfellas* proved to be last year's number one gangster film in the deluge of that genre. Based on the novel

Wiseguy, it is the true life story of mob informer Henry Hill. Scorsese takes us

on a journey from Hill's beginnings as a teenager longing for the seemingly glamorous life as a mobster, through his years as an errand boy for the organization and his subsequent rise in the ranks under the guidance of his 'crew', the psychotic Tommy DeVito (Pesci) and the cool Timmy Conway (De Niro). The three are ruthless and explosive, and it is ultimately De Vito's senseless acts of violence which bring about their downfall.

There's no doubt that *Goodfellas* is a

brilliant film but, unlike the near perfect *Taxi Driver*, it does have faults. Ray Liotta's narration has a hypnotic effect, however it becomes strained, particularly towards the film's conclusion, where the authenticity and atmosphere of a courtroom scene is destroyed by Liotta narrating on screen and not, as previously, in voice over.

This is a minor flaw when compared to Scorsese's bizarre attempts at humour (sick humour) to highlight the callous nature of these people.

The movie is disturbing, even harrowing, yet it seems unlikely that *Goodfellas* will be a rental blockbuster — perhaps, due to the lack of four foot reptiles or Austrian muscle men. It will, however, be remembered as one of the great films of the 90s.

John Merrick



NIGHT OF THE FOX

Starring George Peppard, Deborah Raffin, Michael York
Director Charles Jarrott
Distributor ITC
Cert 15, 100 mins



This piece of World War II skulduggery from the Jack Higgins bestseller about the rescue or kill mission to stop a captured US colonel from spilling the beans on the imminent D-Day plans is a made for TV product in the usual 'bestseller' style.

Higgins' plot should have made a gripping *Where Eagles Dare* thriller, but stilted dialogue, slack direction and lack of period feel stymie the competent cast who just amble through the proceedings. Only Michael York seems to derive some fun playing Rommel and his Jewish double.

Oliver Frey



UFO CAFE

Starring Richard Mulligan, Paul Dooley, Barbara Darré, Beau Bridges, James McEachin
Director Paul Schneider
Distributor ITC
Cert U, 91 mins



The sleepy market town of Grover's Mill (a bit like Ludlow) has seen better days. Its families and businesses are selling up for the lure of the big cities and the once-thriving community spirit is dying away, much to the distress of George Walters. Even his son, Michael, is thinking of leaving, abandoning the hardware store George ran before his retirement.

On Thanksgiving, Michael receives a message from a visiting businessman, Arnold Zimmerman, who needs something from the hardware store to repair his 'vehicle'. George goes to his aid and chats with him at length, Arnold confessing he works on the planet Zabor. He walks off into the darkness and shortly a light flashes across the sky — his spaceship. But who'll believe George met an alien?

UFO Cafe is as lightweight, friendly and inoffensive as George's hometown once was. It's the kind of cosy family film you'd see on ITV on a Sunday afternoon; indeed, it has the same feel and cumbersome camera work/direction as many ETV movies. So while it's a pleasant hour-and-a-half's viewing, you might nod off part way through if you've just eaten a hearty meal. Richard



BARKER'S WILD DREAMS

NIGHTBREED

Starring Craig Sheffer, Anne Bobby, David Cronenberg, Charles Haid
Director Clive Barker
Distributor Warner Home Video
Cert 18, 95 mins



The saga continues... with the long awaited video release of Clive Barker's black fantasy.

For those laggards who don't yet know the story, an alt-American youth Boone (Sheffer) is framed for a series of vicious murders by his psychiatrist, Dr Decker (Cronenberg). Drawn to the mysterious underground world of Midian, where the monsters, freaks and other outcasts live, and at first accepted by the Nightbreed, he betrays their trust by revealing himself as a beast above ground when his human lover Lori (Bobby) is chased through the cemetery by an increasingly manic Decker. The good doctor informs the local police chief Elgerman (Haid) who then sets about a bullheaded genocide of the creatures in Midian.

Although Boone is responsible for the carnage, the Nightbreed's god, Baphomet, forgives him, baptizes him as Cabal and charges him to reunite his people in a new promised land.

Biblical in its storytelling scale, and reminiscent of the story of Moses, *Nightbreed* is desecrated by an ending which is more in line with *Friday The 13th* than the visions of Clive Barker. The Nightbreed are strange and exotic, the special effects wild and Cronenberg makes a fabulous debut in a principal role with his portrayal of Decker — although the character concept makes me uneasy with its similarities to a certain other psychiatrist in *The Silence Of The Lambs*.

If you like Barker's wild dreams — as I, admittedly, do — you'll love *Nightbreed* despite its all too glaring faults. There's a fine beast of a film here struggling, and, if Lon Chaney Jr had been blessed with clairvoyance, it would certainly have taught him a thing or two.

John Gilbert





■ Patrick Swayze bawls out the cat in *Ghost*

Mulligan is comfortable as the eccentric George, a character not unlike a sentimental Bert Campbell, Mulligan's madcap role in the Soap sit com. He doesn't raise any laughs here — no-one does — just a few sympathetic smiles. *UFO Cafe* implies humour but doesn't try to be a comedy, and plays down the tangible SF: the UFO/alien elements are low key.

Though feirly predictable and emphasising its truth and caring message too obviously too often, *UFO Cafe* will go down well with mum and the kids or hopeless dreamers — like George himself.

Warren Lapworth



GHOST

Starring Patrick Swayze, Demi Moore, Whoopi Goldberg, Tony Goldwyn
Director Jerry Zucker
Distributor RCA/Columbia
Cert 12, 100 mins



We held bets on how long this classic 'supernatural love story' could be held back from video release. The theatrical run was still in gear at the beginning of this year, so it surprised us all when RCA/Columbia announced the massive launch promotion for the title and provided us with a release date.

As one of the people who didn't see *Ghost* at the cinema for fear of losing his lunch I was quite surprised when the inanely simplistic, and romantic, storyline, threatened to work.

Swayze has lost the rebel image generated for him in films such as *The Outsiders* and *Road House*, and mellowed into a strong, emotive, leading man. Killed a by mugger in Manhattan, Swayze's Sam watches in ghostly mode as his girl-friend Molly (Moore) sobs

over the body. Unable to influence the real world he eventually finds relief from his impotence through a fake medium, Oda, played by the reel star of this film, Oscar-winner Whoopi Goldberg.

At first, Molly will not believe the messages Oda relays from beyond, but Swayze realizes that contact must be made if Molly is not to die or suffer a fate worse than death. Love, of course, shines through in the end, but doesn't spoil an otherwise fun filled and action packed family film.

John Gilbert



A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM

Starring Michael Caine, Elizabeth McGovern, Peter Riegert, Swoosie Kurtz, Will Patton, Jenny Wright
Director Jan Egleson
Distributor Medusa
Cert 15, 84 mins



Black comedy is so difficult to do well but, after his success in Ira Levin's *Death Trap*, Michael Caine has a lead on most other actors.

Here he plays advertising executive

Graham Marshall who flips his lid when a power greedy rival bypasses him in the promotion stakes. After an electric shock which stirs up his little grey cells, he decides to test run his capacity to commit murder by killing his monumentally irritating wife. The electricity control for his plush pad runs through a light bulb in the basement. He wires up the bulb so that when his wife is alone the power will go down and she will have to reach up and pull the light

■ *UFO Cafe*. Beau Bridges in alien ball boob



switch to turn it on again.

In order to get to the bulb she must stand on a packing crate and hold onto a metal pipe. The connection with the electricity supply through the faulty bulb knocks her for six and her death allows Marshall to stem the rising tide of monetary outflow from his bank account and look forward to the death of his business rival.

Each murder is dogged with problems — clues are left behind, alibis fall through and traps do not work — but, eventually each one works and Marshall progresses up the corporate ladder, winning through to the end of the movie.

Caine should be congratulated for this grand piece of comedy, as should Simon Brett, the writer of the original novel. Together they have created a great new anti-hero.

John Gilbert



■ Michael Caine flips his lid in *A Shock To The System*

Intergalactic alien whose home planet, Zeist, is ruled by a dictatorship in the form of General Katana (Ironsides).

The rebels on the planet are being quickly defeated but they have one hope, in the form of MacCleod, who could set them free. He, meanwhile, has surrendered his immortality during the Quickening of the first movie, and is living the life of an ageing American on 21st century Earth. The planet has undergone an ecological disaster of ozone-mangling proportions and the inhabitants have to survive under a large, sky-encapsulating, sun shield, which is controlled by the Shield

Corporation. But Conner, at the age of 75, is content to die under this alien sun — even if he can't see it.

Katana, however, is not content. He wants all the rebels dead and plans to ensure that Conner will never return to lead his people. The dictator arrives on Earth, but by this time MacCleod has been informed of his plight by his resurrected friend and mentor Ramirez (Connery). Together they must liberate the people of Zeist from Katana's evil rule and expose the Shield Corporation as an evil conglomerate whose shield is no longer needed to sustain life on planet Earth.

■ Highlander (Christopher Lambert) ready to do battle once again

CINEMA

HIGHLANDER II: THE QUICKENING

Starring Christopher Lambert, Sean Connery, Michael Ironsides, Virginia Madsen
Director Russell Mulcahy
Distributor Entertainment
Cert 15



Nobody would have guessed that Conner MacCleod (Lambert) isn't, in fact, a Scottish highlander, but instead an



Sophisticated special effects and an interesting, if garbled, storyline make *Highlander II* an equitable successor to the original film. My one unkind comment is that it is a 'more of the same' type of movie, but the cast — in particular Connery and Ironsides — more than do justice to the script. It's great fun, athletic, and a wonderful looker. So, if you're a fan, you'll know better than to miss it.

John Gilbert



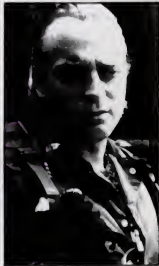
GRAVEYARD SHIFT

Starring David Andrews, Kelly Wolf, Stephen Macht, Brad Dourif
Director Ralph S Singleton
Distributor Columbia Tri-Star
Cert 18



This is a Stephen King adaptation that makes even *Silver Bullet* seem terrific. The source here is a short story taken from King's 1978 collection, *Night Shift*.

In the small New England town of Gate Falls, the recently re-opened textile mill should offer an upturn in fortunes for the hard-pressed community. But there's a spoiler. Something's lurking in the mill's rat-infested basement, something that has already shredded a number of workers. As his operation is faced with closure on safety grounds, tyrannical mill owner Warwick (Macht) assigns a handpicked half-dozen (including college-educated drifter Andrews and tomboy Wolf) for clean-up duties, beginning with the basement.



■ Rat man Brad Dourif

Brad Dourif, as an obsessive Vietnam vet cum rat exterminator, provides the film's only relief with his darkly comic recollections of war atrocities. The rest is sub-standard monster-on-the-loose fodder which doesn't even have the decency to explain the creature's (a slobbering giant rat/bat) origin. First-time director Singleton fails to exploit the potential menace afforded by the basement's darker recesses or the creatures' subterranean hideout. The gore is minimal, the suspense non-existent. It's not even sleazy enough to be exploitative. There's fun (of sorts) to be had in spotting the King references — Bachman, Christine, etc — but other than that it's a stiff. Avoid.

Mark Salisbury




PSYCHOSIS AND MIND GAMES

■ Gothic milieu for Jody Foster and Anthony Hopkins



THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

Starring Jody Foster, Anthony Hopkins, Scott Glenn
Director Jonathan Demme
Distributor Rank

 Serial killers — fictional ones — have had a lot of press recently. The yuppie psychopath in Bret Easton Ellis's grotesquely comic novel *American Psycho* for one; and Dr Hannibal Lecter, as portrayed by Anthony Hopkins in this intelligent adaptation of Thomas Harris's bestseller. Yet given all the fuss regarding Hopkins's admittedly startling performance, most people have forgotten that Brian Cox did it first and did it better.

It's as impossible to discuss *The Silence of the Lambs* without comparison to *Manhunter* (Michael Mann's film version of *Red Dragon* which first introduced Lecter), as it is to begin to appraise the merits of Hopkins's Lecter without reference to Cox's flawless incarnation.

Stylistically the two films couldn't be more different. Demme eschews the sterile hi-tech, at times abstract, visual approach of *Miami Vice* creator Mann, adopting instead a Gothic milieu reminiscent of early Hammer and best reflected by the form of Lecter's imprisonment: Demme houses Lecter in a dank, dark, dungeon and has him wearing a grim grey overall. (Mann opted for white cell, white walls, white clothing). The initial effect of the transition is jarring — it's as if Demme has totally misconceived the film's direction — the result, however, is unnerving. It's a mood that pervades throughout.

The story concerns the hunt for a serial killer known only as Buffalo Bill who is fashioning a suit

of women's skin from the bodies of his victims. The FBI are baffled. They believe that former psychiatrist and convicted mass murderer Dr Lecter has knowledge of his identity. FBI trainee Clarice Starling (the excellent Foster) is assigned to visit Lecter, ostensibly on a routine enquiry, but in the hope of baiting him into relinquishing information which will assist them in his hunt.

Hopkins relishes his role, but the performance teeters on the perimeters of caricature: he's a picture of bug-eyed madness, a leering representation of evil that, while chilling, pales against Cox's subtler examination. Where Cox contained Lecter's insanity behind a calm, urbane exterior, Hopkins is too much like Nicholson's Jack Torrance in Kubrick's adaptation of *The Shining* — he betrays Lecter's psychotic nature from the outset. Granted Hopkins is asked to sustain the persona for feature length — Cox stole *Manhunter* with a ten-minute cameo — but even so, only the briefest of moments, notably when Lecter reaches from inside his cage and caresses Clarice's outstretched hand, do the nuances come into effect.

Demme directs with a relentless urgency, driving home the thrill of the chase, though the film is less about the killer than the mental fucking of Starling by Lecter.

A remarkably faithful, often inspired adaptation of Harris's novel, Demme's film packs a mighty visceral punch that, coupled with its capability to demonstrate man's capacity for evil with such unsettling ease, makes it extraordinarily compulsive, shocking viewing. Watch too for cameo by directors Roger Corman and George Romero.

Mark Salisbury



BUY VIDEO

SLAUGHTER HIGH

Starring Caroline Munro, Simon Scuddamore, Kelly Baker, Sally Cross, Billy Hartman, Gary Martin, Josephine Scandi
Director George Dugdale, Mark Ezra, Peter Litten
Distributor First Fright/First Independent
Cert 18, 85 mins, £10.21



If I never see another high school on celluloid it will not be too soon. Here we go again, though, as Marty, an ordinary and very nerdy high school kid is badly burned after an April Fool's Day prank goes wrong.

Confined to a mental asylum, he soon escapes and plans the murder of his fellow classmates by inviting them to a grand high school reunion on April 1st — I couldn't even be bothered to sling the usual vitriolic quip into brackets at this point.

Marty the murderer wears a jester's mask to do his dirty deeds, which is not surprising when you learn that the film is from the makers of *Friday The 13th*, but is a little unnecessary when you discover that most of the murders occur when the lights go out.

While the film is solidly directed and the cast have obviously entered into the campiness of the thing, *Slaughter High* is pretty low on my list of priorities. It's the sort of movie you can watch while eating a pizza, writing a review on your word processor screen, juggling disks around in your hands, and still guess the finale without too much effort. It is remarkable that small film production companies still waste their time with this type of masked killer trope. Better they thought of something original on a small scale and at least then they could hope for some critical — if not popular — acclaim.

John Gilbert



ARENA

Starring Paul Slattersfield, Hamilton Camp, Claudia Christian
Director Peter Manooogian
Distributor Entertainment in Video
Cert 15, 93 mins, £9.99



A mix of Rocky films and *Star Wars* is the recipe for this enjoyable piece of action from the Charles Band factory. Hunky young Steve and comic four-armed sidekick Shorty lose their jobs in the space-station café after a brawl with an alien punk. Stranded with no money, Steve is manoeuvred by circumstance to earn his ticket back to distant Earth in the arena. Alien versus alien, alien versus human no-holds barred combat under strength-equalizing beams is the craze in the space stations, with a lot of money (legal and illegal) riding on the champs. No human has been champ for 50 years, so Steve's initial success causes quite a stir, and his vow to be number one brings him into conflict with the reigning champ's crooked manager who'll do (and does) anything to ensure his alien brute's victory.

If this was a low-budget enterprise, it doesn't show. Good sets, great lighting,



fluid direction and competent script and acting bring the plot alive, special effects and aliens (albeit heavily borrowed from the Star Wars cantine) are all you could want, and the whole thing keeps you engrossed for the duration. A neat bundle of action, villainy and humour that's never corny and should have done better on its original release — I'll buy it!

Oliver Frey



THE LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM

Starring Amanda Donahoe, Hugh Grant, Catherine Oxenberg, Peter Campaldi, Sammi Davis, Stratford Johns

Director Ken Russell
Distributor First Fright/First Independent
Cert 18, £10.21, 90 mins



Multiple choice: (a) This film was made by Ken Russell and it is a gloriously funny horror romp, a satire which stands with at least some of his other work. (b) It's a pile of... I would prefer to think that (a) is the answer that most horror fans would choose. *Lair Of The White Worm* is definitely tongue in cheek with some wonderfully camp, and very obvious Russell sequences which include a dream of two stocking clad women romping aboard an aircraft, a naked boy having his willy bitten off by a North country version of Vampirella, and an innovative virgin sacrifice scene.

After that, you probably don't want a plot run down, but I'll give it to you anyway. Hugh Grant is the Lord of D'Ampton minor and descendant of the men who killed the infamous D'Ampton worm. Amanda Donahoe is the vampire

guardian of the thing which has survived in an underground network of caverns. She has been sacrificing to her god for years and intends to give Hugh Grant's girl-friend to the not so wee beastie.

The ending is ridiculously funny, if very predictable, and opens the way for a sequel. I hope there isn't one, but that doesn't stop me from giving this Russell romp some shelf space in my video collection.

John Gilbert



RAWHEAD REX

Starring David Dukes, Kelly Piper
Director George Pavlou
Distributor First Fright/First Independent
Cert 18, 85 mins, £10.21



Clive Barker is not too enamoured with this, his feature film writing debut, but I don't think you can be too hard on a novel idea, a whacko monster and some gory special effects.

The idea is culled from one of Clive Barker's *Books Of Blood* in which an ancient Demon, with an outsized skull and huge canines, is released from centuries old purgatory by an unsuspecting farmer in Rathmore, Ireland. The farmer ploughs a local field in which the protective seal which keeps Rawhead from the real world is buried. Once the seal is released from the soil, the cannibalistic king of a creature is free to roam again — and does it roam! Its primary task seems to drain as much blood from human bodies as possible but, as a pre-Christian deity, it

■ Amanda Donahoe ready for action, if only I didn't have a headache



■ Rawhead Rex, a drain on the system

is also not averse to tearing off the odd priest's head.

A gore film which first hit the market when splatter was on the way out, *Rawhead Rex* never did particularly well on rental, but it has a strong enough concept, enough blood to set up a freelance bank, and the Clive Barker tag to keep it selling as part of any budget range.

John Gilbert



THE TWILIGHT ZONE VOLUMES 3, 4 & 5

Starring William Shatner, Telly Savalas, Richard Kiel, Mary Le Rocke, Tracy Stratford, Patrick Macnee (among others).
Director John Brahm, Joseph

Newman, Richard C Sarafian (among others).
Distributor CBS/Fox
Cert 15 £9.99 each



There is a fifth dimension beyond sight and sound, you don't know it's there... but if you're unfortunate enough you may just enter the Twilight Zone. Three cassettes filled to the brim with twelve more episodes of the 60s cult classic (who can mention the name without humming the title tune?) are now on offer for the measly sum of a tenner a throw. Four episodes are on each tape, volume three starts with 'Living Doll' the story of a bewitched doll's vengeance on a callous stepfather. This is followed by 'To Serve Man' where an alien race offer peace but instead want to eat us. 'Judgement Night' where a German U Boat Captain pays for his deeds and 'In Praise Of Pip' where a repentant father tries to save his dying son.

Volume four kicks off with 'Walking



Distance' where a New York businessman decides to get away from the city and return to his hometown, though he ends up thirty years in the past and meets himself as a kid. The hero in 'Nightmare at 20,000 Feet' is plagued by a gremlin on the wing of the plane he's travelling on, in 'The Midnight Sun' the earth is moving toward the sun and a WW2 Army Lieutenant is given the strange gift of seeing who is about to die in 'Purple Testament'. In volume five 'People Are Alike All Over' sees the first manned flight to Mars, in 'Five Characters In Search Of An Exit' five people are trapped in a strange metal container and in 'A Hundred Yards Over The Rim' a settler from the 1860s ends



■ Roddy McDowell (above) in *People Are Alike All Over*, while William Shatner (below) has a *Nightmare At 20,000 Feet*



SHREDDED FLESH

■ The man from Rat-a-tak gets shredded



FOOD OF THE GODS II

Starring Paul Coullos, Lisa Schrage
Director Damien Lee
Distributor Guild Home Video
Cert 18, £10.21, 83 mins



HG Wells would rotate in his coffin if he saw this follow up to a very similar first movie. But, although the effects make much use of furry glove puppets, this movie is certainly full of non-stop action.

Those of you who have read the HG Wells story or seen the first film will be able to predict the evolution of the sequel storyline. Professor Neil Hamilton is doing groundbreaking research on a super fertilizer which he hopes will produce giant plants and vegetables, but it is only when he takes blood from a boy who has been grown into a giant after an accident with an experimental drug that

his tomatoes turn into pumpkin-sized veggies.

The happy ending would have happened right there, but a group of animal rights demonstrators break into his lab, some experimental rats eat the tomatoes and turn into crocodile-sized monsters with huge teeth. Flesh obviously gets shredded, the prof is blamed - although he is largely innocent of anything to do with the accident. He, however, has to clear up the problem, and that means fighting dirty with a pack of rats that are hungry for human meat.

Low budget is the name of the game with *Food Of The Gods II* but the cast take it seriously and the continuous action is worthy of a view. Whether you buy this self-through title, however, will depend upon just one factor: whether or not you're put off by the patter of not so tiny feet.

John Gilbert



up in the 1960s by walking over the crest of a hill.

And finally 'Death's-Head Revisited' sees a former German SS officer visiting the concentration camp he ran during the second world war, though a few of the ghostly inmates repay him for his cruel deeds. Having watched more of the colour remakes of this brilliant series than the B&W originals, I settled down to an evening of nostalgia. It was amazing to see so many household names starring in this series, a very young Richard Kiel (*Jaws* in the Bond movies), William Shatner (before he commanded the *USS Enterprise*), Roddy McDowell (without epe make-up) and the biggest surprise of all, Kojak with a head of hair. Despite most of the stories being of a time travel or alien invasion nature, *Twilight Zone* must rate as one of the best SF series ever (the best of course being *Star Trek*). Even though this original series was made many years ago the episodes are still highly entertaining and occasionally creepy (i.e. *Nightmare at 20,000 feet*).

Ten notes is a small price to pay for a slice of TV history.

Mark Caswell



CLASS OF 1999

Starring Bradley Gregg, Traci Lin, John P Ryan, Pamela Grier, Joshua Miller, Stacy Keach, Malcolm McDowell
Director Mark L Lester
Distributor First Fright/FIRST Independent
Cert 18, 90 mins, £10.21



First Terminator. Then Robocop. Now this...

The year is 1999, law and order has broken down in American class rooms and the governors have decided to employ special robot teachers.

These human-shaped androids can teach but their forte is discipline and, in

one particular public school when the robots malfunction, that discipline becomes terminal for some students. A newly reformed gang leader, played by *Nightmare On Elm Street*'s Bradley Gregg, teams up with the dean's daughter to fight the robot menace with motorbikes and decidedly low-tech weaponry. The violence escalates, the robots lose their human skins and it's Terminator minus big budget time.

Given the limitations of the budget, Commendo director Mark L Lester, has really done a remarkable job with this SF quickie. The human actors might not all be Oscar material - although Gregg shows promise and Stacy Keach is wonderful as the robot controller Dr Forrest - but the special effects are enough to keep the most fidgy of fans on the edge of their seats. It's good, unwholesome, stuff, so go and download it from your video store right now.

John Gilbert



WITCHES' NIGHT

John Gilbert dons his ceremonial robes, calls down the goddess and prepares to do the Widdershins Jig with Skyclad's Steve Ramsey.

The dark Satanic mills of thrash metal music are about to weave out a new tapestry of pagan influences. In the centre of this gloriously coloured web is Skyclad (which translates as 'naked' for all non-Wiccans out there) a band formed by the grittily voiced ex-Sabbat vocalist Martin Walkyier. He is heavily into pagan culture and, although the other band members (Steve Ramsey, Graeme English, and Keith Baxter) are not as closely involved with the philosophy, they want to show a vastly different image to other bands on the scene.

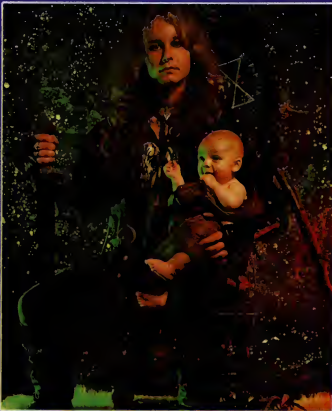
'Martin came to Newcastle and we got together for a drink,' says guitarist Ramsey about the rather mundane genesis of the band. I asked him what he was doing, he told me what he would have liked to do and I said that maybe I could help him start it off.

'A lot of bands in Britain are trying to copy the American bands instead of creating something new. When we heard the demos for the new Sabbath album, Martin basically decided to leave the band.'

While Sabbath continues to be successful, the only similarities between it and Skyclad lie in the culture. Musically, the band has created its own visual and musical style which incorporates traditional metal influences with instruments which have seldom been used in a heavy metal context.

The Wayward Sons Of The Earth album was recorded at Jacobs Studios in Surrey and was produced by Skyclad and Kevin Ridley whose other achievements include work with bands such as Venom, Tormenta, Lindisfarne and Frehleg. The engineer was Simon Osbourne whose recent credits include Phil Collins' *But Seriously* album and Sting's new LP *Soul Cages*. The latter liaison

SKYCLAD AND FANCY FREE



brought Sting's guitarist Dominic Miller into play as classical lead on the ballad 'Moonglean And Meadowswest'.

If the album set-up sounds unusual, the planned live line-up is downright remarkable. It will include a piano player — this is metal? — and a violinist who will guarantee that the reproduction in the auditorium will match that of the studio, particularly on tracks such as 'Widdershins Jig'.

The band is, rightly, excited about the inroads they have made so far into metal consciousness, but the planned gigs should thrust

this new mode of heavy music into the increasingly clichéd rock scene. And for the far future? Well, only Skyclad have that particular crystal ball. 'We haven't had a bad reaction to the first album, although we were at first worried about what people might think about some of the songs. Now we've started writing new material. We'll take the ideas on the first album further. We'll also use different backing instruments, and we've already got a guy who plays Mandolin.' What more can we say but good luck, and Blessed Be!

ESSENTIAL SCIENCE FICTION SOUND EFFECTS VOL1 & VOL2

BBC Enterprises Ltd

There is something fundamentally disturbing and creative about getting your hands on a couple of BBC Radiophonic Workshop sound effect CDs. It's only too easy to lock yourself into a weird world where you program your CD player to hit you with a 19 second burst of flying saucer take-off followed by 42 seconds of flying saucer interior, a 20 second landing sequence, a 4 second electronic door opening, 53 seconds in an enchanted forest, a 40 second meeting with the star fairies... and so it goes — ad lib dialogue courtesy of your own warped imagination, very therapeutic. *Volume 2* of these effects is brilliant for just such shenanigans, and for more socially approved uses of sound effects too; lasting 43 minutes 44 seconds it contains 66 general effects covering outer space, magic and fantasy, suspense and the supernatural, and the elements.

Volume 1, lasting 44 minutes 21 seconds, features 81 sound effects from two radio and two TV SF shows: *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*, *Earth Search*, *Dr Who* and *Blake's 7*. There's the end of the Universe itself (32 seconds), three harmonic strings followed by explosion (7 seconds), Tardis into time elip (10 seconds), and going through a black hole in the Liberator (1 minute 19 seconds). Brilliant stuff. As well as appealing to those seeking guided fantasy kicks, those who want to test their hi-fi, and those who want to convince their neighbours that the aliens have landed, these CDs should also appeal to SF buffs and anyone interested in the incredibly rich developments that the Radiophonic Workshop has pioneered over the years.

Andy Oldfield



BEAUTIFUL DISASTER

Cheap and Nasty
Label China Records

Perhaps Cheap and Nasty had some sort of premonition when they came to name their latest musical offering. The sounds are gloriously varied, but the lyrics no more innovative than any you'll find on any Bon Jovi, Motley Crew, or Poison album.

While there seems to be no coherent theme to this album, the best tracks are the ballads, for want of a better word. The rest are catchy pieces of thrash rock which will bounce into your head, stay for the duration of the sound hitting the speakers and



then skip off without leaving a trace. Still, the same can be said of many a glam band – though I would hasten to add that it is the music and not the band who are glam in this case.

Fans of Bon Jovi, Skid Row, and Cheap Trick might derive some pleasure from this taster of lightweight rock but, if you like your sounds deep, dark, or fresh, you would do well to act Cheap and Nasty – and forget this band.

Jerry Dumpton



THE WAYWARD SONS OF MOTHER EARTH

Skyclad
Label/Loud

A storm rages across the night sky, rain beads through the crack in my windows onto my hunched and ruined frame as the debut album by pagan thrashers Skyclad hits the deck.

In fact, it's a rather drizzly Sunday afternoon, but that wouldn't fit the mood this album conveys. Ex-Sabbat vocalist Martin Walkyier seems to have found the perfect outlet with the creation of Skyclad for his staunch and sincere pagan beliefs. He has gathered around him a coven of shit hot musicians including Pariah guitarist Steve Ramsey and Sting's guitarist Dominic Miller who guests on the icy ballad 'Moongleam' and 'Meadowsweet'.

Side one thrashes through 'The Sky Beneath My Feet' with violin – which works well – to the Hawkwindy 'Trench Dance' stopping for a breather for an acoustic 'Minutes Piece' and then its hey-ho fiddly-dee into one of the gems on this adventurous platter 'The Withershins Jig', but it fits perfectly into the feel of the record – let's hear more of the same.

'Pagan Man' starts side two spinning, conjuring visions of a midsummer night mass. The ballad 'Moongleam And Meadowsweet' is a class song with Martin trimming his growling vocals down to a more genteel affair.

Siagon Kick



To round off, there's the medieval 'Terminus' with a hollow chanting monks sound that was probably conceived in an abbey. The album has a distinctly earthy feel and with the folk undertones adding an unusual dimension we are presented with a worthy tribute to the old gods.

Paul Thompson



THIRD EYE

Redd Kross
Label Atlantic

Remember *Forbidden Planet*, *Barbarella*, *This Island Earth*, *Plan 9*, in fact any spaced out 50s-60s SF? These are the original guys from Planet X.

A blend of B52's and Cheap Trick with more than a dash of Beatles and psychedelia, Redd Kross look and sound real weird but what an exciting sound they make.

Formed by brothers Steven and Jeffrey McDonald this is the LA bands first major label offering. Each track a mini masterpiece of the bizarre – the tongue in cheek cuteness of 'Bubblegum Factory', the sparkling single 'Annie's Gone', intense gospel and killer guitar of 'Zire', a wah-wah and honky-tonk rocker '1976' and the manic power pop jam of 'Elephant Flares' all intermix creating an alternative universe of sounds. The most refreshing album I have heard in a long time.

Paul Thompson



SAIGON KICK

Siagon Kick
Label Third Stone/Atlantic

Miami band Saigon Kick are mean muthas who want to be everyone and everything, an attitude which leads to one of the most diverse albums I've heard in a long while.

Recorded in an incredible 11 days, and produced by Michael Wagener (whose production credits include Motley Crew, Skid Row and White Lion) for Third Stone records, which is a label owned by actor/director/son



of Kirk, Michael Douglas.

Saigon Kick have concocted a Pandora's Box of differing styles and directions, culminating in a Frankenstein's monster of an album. Opening with a distinctly eastern feel, which permeates the entire record, the brain cells are suddenly curried by an out of the blue thrash attack and what then ensues is a mind expanding trip through the worlds of Megadeth, The Beatles, Poison and Cheap Trick with a splash of Moody Blues for added colour.

Rich harmonies are the state of play throughout, giving a much needed light and texture to the menace and rawness of this Gothic beast. Classic cuts include 'What You Say' with its tight harmonies and catchy hook line, the Moody Blues indulgence of 'Colours' the shift stirring eastern 'Coming Home' and 'My Life', a mutated Beatles number of epic proportions, its 14 tracks of assorted mayhem provide something for every metal head to get off on, and plans are already under way to bring Saigon Kick to Britain. I'll be there, so should you.

Paul Thompson



WIRED FOR WEIRDNESS

Computer generated virtual reality, where humans can enter and manipulate a separate and convincing world is something familiar to all cyberpunks, courtesy of Bill Gibson. Wired-out techno-freaks on the American west coast have been experimenting with their own machinery, interfacing head-mounted monitors and psychedelic software in search of safe trips. And 'serious' applications have been mooted, such as making cheaper more effective flight simulators for advanced fighter jet-pilot training, simulating hostile environments and situations such as nuclear power plant meltdowns for emergency services, etc.

But guess what the first commercially available virtual reality system is designed for? You guessed it. Games!

At the recent world launch of W Industries' *Virtuality*, I sat in the console, donned the headset with 360° stereoscopic graphic and quadraphonic sound capabilities, ignored the 'insert coin' legend and found myself piloting a Harrier, getting hot at and blowing away some other planes before running out of fuel and crashing into a nearby hill. A

Not at Dixons yet, The Virtuality Machine

shame that the headset was faulty and wouldn't lock on. Under normal conditions the outside world is shut out totally, the intrusion of extraneous external noises doesn't help foster the illusion of reality. Still, it beats my son's old ZX Spectrum. And the scenery changing as you move your head around is a novel experience.

Starting at around £20,000, you won't be picking the hardware up in Dixons for a while, but it should start hitting the arcades soon. The cyberpunk future isn't here yet, but it's on its way.

Andy Oldfield

COMPETITION WINNERS

NEW YEAR MEGACOMP First prize

winner: J Bailey, Cardiff; L Purtil, Hants.

Second prize winners: G

Budd, Cardiff; C Matheson, Aberdeen.

Third prize winners: A Fishwick, Sheffield; R Smith, Cheshire; J Walsh, Cornwall; J Blair, Hants; D Billington, Cheshire.

Runner-up prizes: N Oram, Newton Abbot; M Holden, Rochdale; P Dight, Gosport; P Murray, Somerset; J Harper, Henley-on-Thames; C Cameron, London.

GIVE US A GREMLIN winners: J

Harvey, Dagenham; C Taylor, Liverpool; P Kehoe, Preston; I

Champion, Luton; B Davies, Cardiff.

DARK AND DREADFUL winners: J

O'Donovan, Manchester; C Boyle, Herts; J Davies, Cheltenham; P

Fleming, Cleveland; K Cowley, Avon.

PIN winners: R Perry, Reading; S

Harris, Birmingham; B Collins, West Midlands; R Ballard, Darlington; C

Pickersgill, Dorchester.

PLAY TO KILL winners: L Hardy, Sheffield; R Moore, Reigate; J

Marston, Wimbome; S Hailstone, Lancs; G Jukes, West Midlands; G

Johnson, Willoughby; N Yorks; B

Enthistle, Manchester; R Graco, Basildon; A Peters, Dyfed; I Glesper, Ledbury.

SEEDS OF DISCONTENT winners:

M Griffin, Hastings; J Noble, S Wales, W Collins, Wolverhampton; G

Webster, Hull; P Dight, Gosport.

MEMORY MAN winners: C Mitchell, Newcastle-upon-Tyne; J Matthews, South Wirral; S G Gleming, Ayrshire; R

Howcroft, Lancs; M Hanks, N Nottingham; K Curran, Cheshire; J

Hawkins, Birmingham; A Wise, Hull; J

Nicholls, Oban; S Nilsen, Denmark.

GRAPHIC DE

Warren Lapworth, owner of the largest comics collection in Ludlow (not such a great feat, we admit), grabs a few new and established titles and settles down for a cosy read...

Dark Horse's *Venus Wars* (£1.40, import) take place on a planet drastically different from the one we know. A giant ice asteroid, Apollon, collided with Venus, blowing most of its atmosphere into space. What remained combined with the asteroid ice fragments and formed acidic seas. The planet's rotation was speeded up to one revolution every 112 days. Venus was thus transformed into a habitable planet.

That was in 2003. In 2007, a manned spaceship landed, and in 2012 the first Earth colony was established.

The story really begins in 2063, during a heavy tank assault, part of the as-yet unexplained *Venus Wars*, but soon shifts to a sports stadium in Io, the capital city of the continent of Aphrodite. Talak stadium is the setting for the popular sport of beetle-bike, best described as a cross between rugby and motor cross, and the star of the show is Ken Sano. But military officials have uses for him much more important than simply sport...

Unfortunately, *The Venus Wars* is another comic afflicted by 'leunch issue syndrome'. This is the condition where a title's first issue merely sets the scene for the series; some background information is given but little actually happens. Creator Yoshikazu Yasuhiko's generous page allocation makes *The Venus Wars* a terrible victim: title page, three pages on Venus's rebirth, three-page visual intro, eight pages devoted to a seemingly inconsequential tank beetle...

What little story is finally revealed when we get to the real story — on page 16 — is readable, in a disposable sort of way, but other than it's impossible to judge one way or the other. Artwork is stereotypical Japanese: anyone who isn't a shifty-looking villain has big eyes, button nose, tiny mouth, weak jawline and appears to be just the wrong side of puberty.

There are too few science fiction comics for *The Venus Wars* to deserve cancellation, so I'm hoping future issues have enough substance to make it a mild success.

BRUTAL DELUXE

Things aren't going too well for the mythical lord of Tir Nan Og: Drune Lords and Formorians have massed to attack the Tribes of the Earth Goddess. But there is hope in the Goddess's ranks: Mec Roth, Sun King of Sessair, best known as *Slaine: The Horned God* (Volume 3, Fleetway, £5.99). *Slaine* has a not-so-cunning plan: unite the Tribes and the Goddess's Forbidden Weapons of Atlantis. He's warned that this elimgthy conjunction may bring a disastrous new era of witchcraft, but the Goddess gives him the go ahead, on one condition. *Slaine* must conform to the disciplines of the Horned God, which could change him for the better — or the worst.

SLAINE

LEAVING OFF THE PACHT, TOTALLY WARRPED, SLAINE BEGAN A LAUDERDUS, CRIMSON, BRUTAL CHARGE, HEAVING AND CLEAVING, STABBING AND CUTTING AND MUTILATING HIS WAY THROUGH THE DEMONS

KILLING FIFTY TO THE LEFT... AND FIFTY TO THE RIGHT. HE DIDN'T THINK IT TOO HARD.

Barbarian heroes have never appealed to me; muscles, loin cloth and battle sword spoil instant boredom and cliché, especially when supporting characters are busty maidens and dumb creatures (my anti-fantasy bias strikes again...). While *Slaine* isn't as crass as Conan, his oddly cool, mean attitude doesn't elevate him that much, particularly in this graphic novel, where it's been dropped for a *Tir Nen Og* power struggle.

Is it because I haven't read the first two parts, or is book three of *Slaine*: The Horned God garbled, incongruous nonsense? It's far below Pat Mills usually high standards. It has the most confused narrative I've had the uneasy pleasure of reading in a long time. Only the fight scenes make complete sense—but the reasons for them don't. I dunno, maybe I'm me.

I've no complaint with the artwork, mind you; quite the opposite. Simon Bisley's work never fails to impress and his daffy shaded painting is excellent for reproducing *The Horned God's* muscle-bound characters; it's reminiscent of a stretched, cynical Les Edwards. If you like Bisley's work (and who doesn't), this *Slaine* story is worth buying, otherwise...

RIPPING YARNS

The shadowy streets of Whitechapel, circa 1880, come alive once more, as Alan Moore's *Toboo* serial is bound into a graphic novel series, *From Hell* (Tundra Publishing, import). The first volume reprints the prologue and first two chapters from *Toboo* 2 and 3.

The prologue depicts a conversation between Robert Lees and Inspector Fred Abberline as they stroll along the Bournemouth seafont, discussing their involvement in the infamous Whitechapel murder case, best known for the nickname of its perpetrator(s), Jack the Ripper. Chapter one relates the meeting and marriage of sweetshop attendant Annie Crook and Walter Sickert, the false identity of Prince Eddy, one of the prime suspects. Doctor William Gull and James Hinton are the subjects of the second chapter, which deals with dubious medical practices, Freemasonry and political cover-up.

From Hell is not to be taken lightly; Alan Moore has obviously taken this project very seriously and put in a great deal of research. Most scenes are closely based on fact and those which aren't have been naturally developed from known character associations and traits.

Although sharply, accurately

TOXIC!

told, *From Hell* has its faults. Chapter two degenerates into a mess of cold events; Moore has created situations to help the story along but they're not enough. Individual scenes work well but they rarely mesh with what comes before or after. The resultant staccato style makes it difficult to concentrate on the story as a whole.

The choice of artist—Eddie Bechus Campbell—is a fitting one. Campbell's simple, rough end, to be frank, bleak visuals are perfect for the seedy Victorian story: somehow everything looks very old and inwardly hostile. This interpretation of the facts derived from the Whitechapel murders has limited appeal to the comics-buying public—its something your average *Deadline* reader will wince to—but perfect for the many people who are fascinated by the Jack the Ripper case.

GIVEN THE GREEN LIGHT

After reviewing the first part of the sequel series last month, I find it appropriate to step back in time and review the original *Emerald Dawn* series, now reprinted in a single volume (DC, £3.10, import). Hal Jordan was a US test pilot before being demoted to using flight simulators at a test of the poy. A drink with friends makes matters worse: driving them home, somewhat the worse for wear, he

swerves to avoid a roadsign and tips the jeep over into another car, putting himself in hospital.

Discharging himself, Hal works off some aggression on a flight simulator—which takes off and carries him to the site of a crashed spacecraft several hundred miles away. He's taken inside by a giant hand of solid light, one of the last actions of a dying Green Lantern, one of the guardians of the galaxy. He gives Hal the source of his light-manipulating powers, a lantern, and a ring which is its more portable cousin.

Donning the ring, Hal finds himself in a Green Lantern costume, capable of flight and unsure of his new abilities. But he better learn how best to use them soon as a great threat to the Lanterns and their leaders' planet is about to rear its head.

The *Emerald Dawn* II series is filling in the details of how Hal became a fully trained Lantern, but this story, formulated by Keith Giffen, Gerard Jones and Jim Owsley, is his actual origin. This makes *Emerald Dawn* a pleasing read—Hal is too stunned, moody and surprised by everything that happens to him to calm down and let his egotistical, mecho jerk-side out personality traits that are amplified in Guy Gardner, Earth's latest Lantern).

Emerald Dawn is a light, highly enjoyable origins adventure with simple but adequate art. Its downfall is its wish to be readily acceptable; to keep the cost down, it's printed on standard

comic paper—tacky for a complete bound series. But for three quid and with about a hundred pages, what do you expect? Blood?

WHAT A WASTE

As I'm sure you know (and if you don't, what have you been doing for the past two months?), Britain

has a new weekly comic, *Toxic!*, from Apocalypse Ltd. Inevitably, it appears these days. It's an anthology title, with around five stories (or rather parts of stories, usually) per issue.

Toxic! 4 (issue 7 or 8 will be on the news-stands by the time you read this), as with the previous issues, opens with the 'big name', *Marshal Fen*. For those unfamiliar with the hero-slaughtering psycho—not that there's much to the character to learn—*Toxic!* is kind enough to reprint his earlier adventures. Indeed, as far as I could judge (I'm not a massive *Marshal Fen*), the first *Toxic!* presented his first story. The caricatures of DC and Marvel heroes are blatant and the action can get repetitive, but artwork's as brisk and fun as most *Marshal Law* stories are; this one concerns the undead rising of heroes the *Marshal* has killed in the past.

Accident Men is Mike Fallon, a hit man who suffers from PMT—Post Murder Tension. At the local pub, a particularly loathsome



FEAR

contractor hires Fallon to off a foreign diplomat. Visuals are jokey, yet brutal and with pastel shaded backgrounds. The story reads like a cross between *The Punisher* and *Marshal Law*, not a massive surprise as Pat Mills writes both *Marshal* and *Accident Man*, and the former is partially based on the Punisher.

Edward Ross is diagnosed as suffering from mutomania, and is summoned for execution but escapes. *Mutomania* obviously isn't a fave: it gets the *Toxic!* office: it only gets three pages in issue four, in which virtually nothing happens. It's drawn by Michael McMahon — he of the square, patchwork faces — but *Toxic!* are slack with their credit panels so I've no idea who's written it. Just as well, I'd only criticize them...

The Driver is gerbage. Some huge speeds around in a massive customized juggernaut, ploughing up people and through buildings as he goes. Crude art, no story, garbage.

The Bogie Man is resurrected. This time the deranged Scottish detective is on the trail of Taiwan Lii and Manchurian Dragon, neither of which exist, except in his mind. This time Bogie's in colour, but he looks nothing like Humphrey Bogart, which is half the premiss behind the character. But he's still my favourite nutcase this side of The Tick.

Strangely enough, my favourite part of *Toxic!* 4 is a rather amusing two-page text section called *13 Ways You Can Help The Greenhouse Effect*. This is just what the title implies, a range of ridiculous ideas to waste power and ruin the atmosphere. Very *The Damage*, I'm sure.

Toxic! isn't quite a UK weekly, as much of its material is bought from American sources (*Marshal*

Law and *Mutomania*, for starters). It's a strange mixture of US and UK, new and reprint, with a quirky, aggressive viewpoint. It's already a success, picking up healthy trade from 2000 AD readers and, one would expect (particularly with Pat Mills' presence), *Crisis* fans.

Toxic! is a much better comic than the late, unlamented *Revolver*, and its pricing is its only major stumbling block: 99p is on the steep side for a weekly.

YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE WITH...

Last year, Marvel broke away from the idea of a single plotline running through their annuals in favour of a handful of four-part stories. They've retained the concept and this year's first annual story is *The Von Strucker Gambit*, beginning in *Daredevil Annual* 7 (90p).

Nazi Baron Von Strucker is SHIELD (Strategic Hazard Intervention Espionage Logistics Directorate) leader Nick Fury's arch enemy from World War II. Strucker's recently been resurrected and has created three mutant minions, Gullotine, Romulus and Sathen. They break from his control and Strucker sends personal bounty hunters after them. Striklan, aka Crippler, is sent after the female energy vampire, Sathan. And yep, *Daredevil* gets caught between them.

The annual's three back-up stories feature Ben Urich, DD's reporter confidant. Crippler and the Fatboys, a group of children who DD befriended a couple of years back.

Although the artist changes from story to story, *Daredevil Annual* 7's look is consistently middle-of-the-road, some atmospheric use of shadows in the lead story and clean line work

in the Fatboys' adventure are the only redeeming features. And while it's clear some attempt at originality and purpose has been put into the back-up stories, Gregory Wright's scripts are standard superhero fare. The same can be said of the monthly *Daredevil*, since Ann Nocenti's departure — her *Daredevil* stories were little short of brilliant, at least the equal of Frank Miller's Crippler is a worthwhile creation — his wacky, perverse, sadistic personality is great — but as he's unlikely to appear again for a while the remainder of *The Von Strucker Gambit* holds little promise.

BEDTIME TALES

I don't know what it is about Eclipse Comics' *Miracleman* (£1.55, import) that attracts British talent but I'm certainly not complaining. Issue 20 centres around the home of Rachel, the erstwhile lover of the omniscient *Miracleman*, and a visit from Mist, their very young but gifted child. Glen, the son of Rachel's flatmate, accompanies Mist and Rachel reads them *Winter's Tale*, a magical adventure starring a Mist character.

This comic and particularly this story suits Neil Geiman down to the ground; the whole thing has a mystical, fairy-tale air. This is clearly the case in the *Winter's Tale* section, which goes as far as being laid out like a child's storybook, Rachel, Mist and Glen interrupting the text and fanciful illustrations every so often.

Mist brings the whole thing to life; she's like a fairy or pixie in human toddler form. Mark Buckingham draws her beautifully, capturing just the right balance between angelic innocence and mischievousness, her pure youth belying the intelligence her words reveal. Give *Miracleman* a look, you won't regret it.

● **TIM BURTON** directs Edward Scissorhands, Beetlejuice in Love and, eventually, Batman 2. We visit his LA pad and chew the fat with this most impressive of fantasy film makers.

● **HERSCHELL GORDON** LEWIS dishes the dirt on his infamous series of 60s shockers, such as *Gorefest* and *Blind Fear*. You're unlikely to see another interview like this from the Grandfather of Gore, so grab it while it's hot.

● **APOCALYPSE NOW** Yes, honestly. We could have run it this month but, after a quick look at the copy, we decided that it deserved the best coverage possible. So, at this moment we're again combing the stills libraries to make this feature bigger, brighter and better than we could ever have envisioned it.

● **LARRY COHEN** one of the horror genre's most respected film makers, takes an Ambulance ride and regales us with tales of the *Alive* series and *Q* the Winged Serpent.

PLUS Guy Gavriel Kay talks about *Fionavar*, his new book, and the work he did in organizing JRR Tolkien's work for posthumous publication... Ray Garton, puts the sex back into horror with *Trade Secrets*... more pervy shenanigans with *Liquid Dreams*... we drop in on the making of *The First Power*, starring Lou Diamond Phillips... and, at last, *KNE-EX* rush us the latest on their new 'it stars everyone in the horror film field' movie, *From Dusk 'till Dawn*.

MIRACLEMAN

One day Winter bilkled. And between the beginning of the blink and the end, a Blue Warpmisth was standing on her little boat.

"Hello, Winter," said the Blue Warpmisth. "I have a message for you from the Black Warpmisths."

"Hello. Why are you blue?" asked Winter. "Blue Warpmisths are artists and dancers and painters and bureaucrats," said the Warpmisth, whose name was Lona Krill.

"White Warpmisths are warriors. Grey Warpmisths are diplomats. Red Warpmisths tend the hearts of stars..."

"And Black Warpmisths?" asked Winter.



"They are very big," said Lona Krill. "They sent me to say that The Adversary is destroying London. He and your family are going to have a fight."

"Let me know who wins," said Winter.

"I will," said Lona Krill. He went away.

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All that and more in your organ of gore.